P. W. Smith

PUBLISHED
TWICE A MONTH

Adventure

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OVEN BAKED BEANS

For a satisfying meal, appetizing, and quickly prepared, give your family and guests Heinz Oven Baked Beans.

Really baked, in dry heat ovens—that's why they are so delicious, so rich and so digestible. Four kinds—all oven baked.

One of the **57**

FOUR KINDS

Heinz Baked Beans with Pork and Tomato Sauce
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New Oliver Typewriters
At About Half Price

Latest Model
Number Nine

Was $100
Now $57

FREE TRIAL—
No Money Down
Over a Year to Pay

Save $43

By This New Plan—Be Your Own Salesman

The Guarantee of a $2,000,000 Concern
That This $57 Typewriter Was $100

During the war we learned that it was unnecessary to have great numbers of traveling salesmen and numerous, expensive branch houses throughout the country. We were also able to discontinue many other superfluous, costly sales methods.

You benefit by these savings. The $57 Oliver is the identical machine that was formerly $100. Not one change has been made in design or materials. Each machine is a new Oliver 9—our latest and finest product.

The $100 Model

The Oliver Nine is the finest, the costliest, the most successful model we ever built. If any typewriter is worth $100, it is this handsome machine, the greatest Oliver triumph.

Over 800,000 have been sold. This is the same commercial machine used by the U. S. Steel Corporation, the Standard Oil Company, the National City Bank of New York, Montgomery Ward & Co., the Pennsylvania Railroad, and a host of others. Any operator can use the Oliver.

Free Trial; No Money Down

Here is our plan: We ship an Oliver Nine to you for five days' free trial. No money down—no C. O. D. Use it in your office or at home. Try it—without anyone to influence you.

If you want to keep it, send us $3 per month.

If you want to send it back, we even refund the out going transportation charges.

That is the entire plan. You are the sole judge. At no time during the trial are you under the slightest obligation to buy. Superiority and economy alone must convince you.

August 1, 1920, the price of the Oliver Typewriter will be $64. We are compelled to make this advance because of the increased cost of production. The Oliver remains the same. We will not lower its quality. The addition in cost insures its superiority. The $57 price of the Oliver has been widely advertised. We want to be entirely fair so we notify you in advance of the change.

Amazing Facts

We have just published a startling book, entitled "The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy," which reveals the inside history of the typewriter world—old customs of selling—secrets never before divulged—all about price inflation—subsidies, etc. All the follies of $100 pricing are exposed. Readers are astounded.

Mail the coupon now. You will be surprised.

This book tells everything. With it we send our catalog, free trial order blanks, etc. After reading it, you may order a free-trial Oliver.

Canadian Price, $72. Until Aug. 1, 1920 (97.03)

The OLIVER Typewriter Company
73A Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

FREE BOOK

THE OLIVER TYPEWRITER CO.
73A Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

☐ Ship me a new Oliver Nine for five days' free inspection. If I keep it, I will pay $57 at the rate of $3 per month. The title to remain in you until fully paid for.

My shipping point is.....
This does not place me under any obligation to buy. If I choose to return the Oliver, I will ship it back at your expense at the end of five days.

☐ Do not send a machine until I order it. Mail me your book—"The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy," your de luxe catalog and further information.

Name.....
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This coupon not valid unless mailed and postmarked before midnight, July 31, 1920.

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Volume 26
Number 2

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Get The Grit Out of Your Machine

STRONGFORT
The Perfect Man

YOU can't expect the wonderful human machine God gave you to run right on or last any length of time when its bearings are clogged up and its vital parts out of order and breaking down.

You can't do good work while the insidious poison of constipation is soaking through your system, affecting every vital organ and befuddling your brain; you can't advance in your business or profession, if chronic headaches are unfitting you for keen, mental work; you can't make friends and forge ahead and win a success in the world, if indigestion, dyspepsia or biliousness have made you a sickly grouch.

Get the grit out of your machine—oil it up—put it in order; keep it running so that every ounce of energy you put into your work COUNTS—and there won't be any doubt of your getting ahead.

Make Yourself Fit

It's the only way to win out—it's the only way to get any real happiness out of life. What's the use of living at all, if you wake up each morning feeling rotten, with your muscles aching, your nerves in a frazzle, a weight in your chest and an ache in your head—unfit for either work or play? You can't be happy while in that condition; you can't make your wife or anyone else happy; nobody wants you around. It's the well, strong, happy, cheerful man who makes friends that help him on in the world.

Look the facts in the face—take stock of yourself—and then take steps to get rid of the Old Man of the Sea who is slowly but surely forcing you into the discard. You can do it, **if you will only realize your condition AND ACT.**

You can free yourself from your handicapping ailments, build yourself up, become well and strong and vigorous again, if you go about it the right way.

Let Me Help You I know how to do it. I have spent my life studying out the surest, quickest way. I have visited and investigated the methods in the greatest gymnasia of the world. I have made a special study of wornout, broken-down men. I can and will do for YOU what I have done and am doing for thousands of other discouraged, almost hopeless men.

Let me show you how to clean up your internal machinery and put it in A1 running order. Let me teach you how to develop your figure, so it will be handsome and symmetrical. Let me tell you the way to strengthen your heart, lungs, stomach and every other vital organ . . . steady your nerves, clear your brain—BUILD YOU UP, into a well, strong MAN, full of life, enthusiasm, pep, punch and ginger. I can do it, and it doesn't make a particle of difference what your present condition is or what brought you to it. I GUARANTEE to improve you 100 per cent if you will follow my directions for a few months.

Strongfortism Strongfortism sums up in one word Nature's way of Making over Men. Physicians and surgeons the world over bank on the great recuperative power of Nature as the biggest factor in the treatment of any case. Give Nature half a chance, and she will work a cure. Strongfortism is simply Nature's way of building life. No patent medicines about it; no drug store dope of any kind. No expensive gymnastic outfit required. No iron-bound routine of tiresome, muscle-flagging exercises. You can practice Strongfortism and get all the benefit out of it in your own home.

Send for My Free Book Learn about Strongfortism. You will find it all explained, in frank, straightforward, man-to-man language, in my book, **"Promotion and Conservation of Health, Strength and Mental Energy."** You can't afford not to read that book. IT'S FREE—but you gladly would pay a good sum for it, if you knew what it would do for you. Send for it now—TODAY. DON'T WAIT—FILL OUT THE COUPON NOW, and send it to me with three 2c stamps to cover packing and postage, and I will mail you the book and a special letter covering the points you are particularly interested in.

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Mr. Lionel Strongfort, Newark, N. J.

Dear Strongfort:—Please send me your book, **"Promotion and Conservation of Health, Strength and Mental Energy,"** for postage of which I enclose three 2c stamps to cover mailing expenses. I have marked (X) before the subject in which I am interested. (1282)

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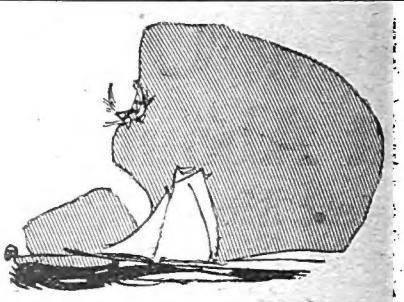

GOLD!

Not all of us can journey to the South Seas for adventure and easy gold. But after all, it is really not necessary: There is plenty of it lying around you! In your own home town the opportunities are piled mountain high. During your spare time you can pick up all the way from $15.00 to $100.00 weekly and have lots of fun doing it.

Our Plan Does the Trick

You need no experience. You invest no money. Yet you begin making big money the very day you receive our instructions, and in a very short time you can build up a business that will bring you an independent income. The work is pleasant. You are your own boss—work whenever you like. Our liberal commissions and salary give you the chance to make all the money you want. There is no limit to what you can earn. But you must act at once. New representatives are being appointed every day. You be the first to get started in your vicinity. The coupon below brings full instructions of our money-making plan without obligation to you. Mail it! Quick!

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Tell me about your plan for picking up the gold in my vicinity.

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"$1,000 Saved!"

"Last night I came home with great news! Our savings had passed the $1,000 mark!

"I remember reading one time that your first thousand saved is the most important money you will ever have, for in saving it you have laid a true foundation for success in life. And I remember how remote and impossible it seemed then to have such a sum of money.

"I was making $15 a week and every penny of it was needed just to keep us going. It went on that way for several years. Then one day I woke up! I found I was not getting ahead simply because I had never learned to do anything in particular. As a result whenever an important promotion was to be made, I was passed by. I made up my mind right then to invest an hour after supper each night in my own future, so I wrote to Scranton and arranged for a course that would give me special training for our business.

"I can't understand why I had never realized before that this was the thing to do. Why, in a few months I had a whole new vision of my work! The general manager was about the first to note the change. An opening came and he gave me my first real chance—with an increase. A little later another promotion came with enough money to save $25 a month. Then another increase—I could put aside $50 each pay day. So it went.

"Today I am manager of my department—with two increases this year. We have a thousand dollars saved! And this is only the beginning. We are planning now for a home of our own. There will be new comforts for Rose, little enjoyments we have had to deny ourselves up to now. And here is a real future ahead with more money than I used to dare to dream that I could make. What wonderful hours they are—those hours after supper!"

For 28 years the International Correspondence Schools have been helping men and women everywhere to win promotion, to earn more money, to have happy, prosperous homes, to know the joy of getting ahead.

More than two million have taken the up road with I. C. S. help. Over 100,000 are now turning their spare time to profit. Hundreds are starting every day. Isn't it about time for *you* to find out what the I. C. S. can do for you?

You, too, can have the position you want in the work of your choice, you can have the kind of a salary that will make possible money in the bank, a home of your own, the comforts and luxuries you would like your family to have. No matter what your age, your occupation or your means—you can do it!

All we ask is a chance to prove it—without obligation on your part or a penny of cost. That's fair, isn't it? Then mark and mail this coupon.

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INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
BOX 2030-B, SCRANTON, PA.

Explain, without obligating me, how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject, *before* which I mark X.

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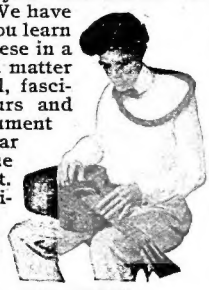
Play the Hawaiian Guitar

Just Like the Hawaiians!

Our method of teaching is so simple, plain and easy that you begin on a piece with your first lesson. In half an hour you can play it! We have reduced the necessary motions you learn to only four—and you acquire these in a few minutes. Then it is only a matter of practice to acquire the weird, fascinating tremolos, staccatos, slurs and other effects that make this instrument so delightful. The Hawaiian Guitar plays any kind of music, both the melody and the accompaniment. Your tuition fee includes a beautiful Hawaiian Guitar, all the necessary picks and steel bar and 52 complete lessons and pieces of music.



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First Hawaiian Conservatory of Music, Inc.
233 Broadway NEW YORK

I am interested in the HAWAIIAN GUITAR. Please send complete information, special price offer, etc., etc.

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$1 Week

Magnificent BICYCLE OFFER

Have fun and healthful exercise with a bicycle! Own the Black Beauty, the finest bike in the world! No waiting. Just send for Catalog, select your model, and we'll ship at once. Pay a small deposit, then $1 a week (or $5 a month). Direct to you at FACTORY PRICE.

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18 Exclusive Features The wonderful Black Beauty equipment includes $10 Firestone Blue Non-Skid Tires; New Departure Coaster Brake; motorcycle saddle, pedals and handlebars; chrome steel ball bearings, etc.

FREE! Repair Kit, Tool Case and Stand

Five yr. guarantee, and six mos. insurance on the wheel. The Black Beauty has **sporty lines**, marvelous steel construction, dazzling finish. Write today for Catalog.

Sundries Get our factory prices. Lowest in the country. Tires, lamps, horns, rims, etc. Send for Free Sundries Catalog.

HAVERFORD CYCLE CO.
Dept. 587 PHILADELPHIA

pays for the **Black Beauty.** FREE Catalog in colors

Are *you* longing for ADVENTURE?

Are you itching to get away from life's daily routine? Are you wishing and wishing that "something would happen"? Are you saying to yourself, "I must get out of this rut—" then

Here's your chance

Not only will you get adventure—out of doors, and plenty of it—but there's money, real money, for you in this plan of ours. Every man who has his evenings to himself, or owns any spare time at all, can add dollars and happiness to his life. This coupon paves the way. It brings to you the same plan by which others have made thousands of dollars on the side. Just fill in your name and address. There's no obligation. You invest no money. But act at once.

MAIL COUPON TODAY

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Box 560, Butterick Bldg.
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Please send particulars about your plan.

Name .....

Address .....

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Like Honeyed Snowflakes

TWO feathery crusts as frail as winter's first ice-film. Between them a cool, creamy filling that melts on the tongue. Delightfully flavored and deliciously sweet —like honeyed snowflakes— to improve a refreshing beverage, a luscious fruit, a tempting ice, or to comprise a glorious feast in themselves. Such are NABISCO, Sugar Wafers incomparable.

Sold in the famous In-er-seal Trade Mark package

NATIONAL BISCUIT COMPANY

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A Wife Too Many

Into the hotel lobby walked a beautiful woman and a distinguished man. Little indeed did the gay and gallant crowd know that around these heads there flew stories of terror—of murder—and treason. That on their entrance, half a dozen detectives sprang up from different parts of the place.

Because of them the lights of the War Department in Washington blazed far into the night. With their fate was wound the tragedy of a broken marriage, of a fortune lost, of a nation betrayed.

It is a wonderful story with the kind of mystery that you will sit up nights trying to fathom. It is just one of the stories fashioned by that master of mystery

CRAIG KENNEDY
The American Sherlock Holmes
ARTHUR B. REEVE
The American Conan Doyle

He is the detective genius of our age. He has taken science—science that stands for this age—and allied it to the mystery and romance of detective fiction. Even to the smallest detail, every bit of the plot is worked out scientifically. For nearly ten years, America has been watching his Craig Kennedy—marvelling at the strange, new, startling things that detective hero would unfold.

FREE—POE

10 Volumes

To those who send the coupon promptly, we will give FREE a set of Edgar Allan Poe's works in 10 volumes.

When the police of Paris failed to solve one of the most fearful murder mysteries of the time, Edgar Allan Poe—far off here in New York—found the solution.

The story is in these volumes.

In England, France, Edgar Allan Poe is held to be the greatest writer that America has produced. To them he is the great American classic.

This is a wonderful combination. Here are two of the greatest writers of mystery and scientific detective stories. You can get the Reeve at a remarkably low price and the Poe FREE for a short time only.

HARPER & BROTHERS **Established 1817**

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HARPER & BROTHERS, 200 Franklin Square, N. Y. Adv. 7-18-20

Send me, all charges prepaid, set of Arthur B. Reeve—in 12 volumes. Also send me, absolutely FREE, the set of Edgar Allan Poe, in 10 volumes. If the books are not satisfactory, I will return both sets within 10 days at your expense. Otherwise I will send you $1 within five days and $2 a month for 14 months.

Name .....

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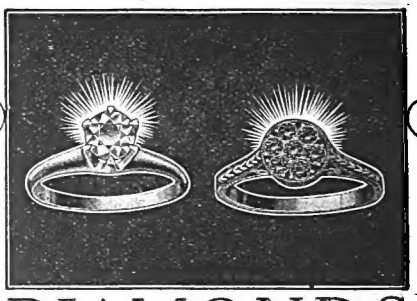


DIAMONDS
for a Few Cents a Day

SEND your name and address and we will send you our 128-page book of diamond bargains. It is the result of nearly 100 years' experience and shows you millions of dollars' worth of jewelry to choose from—and they may be paid for at the rate of **only a few cents a day.**

No Money Down

The diamond you select will be sent upon your simple request—*without a penny down.* Then if you do not think it the *greatest bargain* you have ever seen, send it back at our expense. If you decide to keep it, your credit is good.

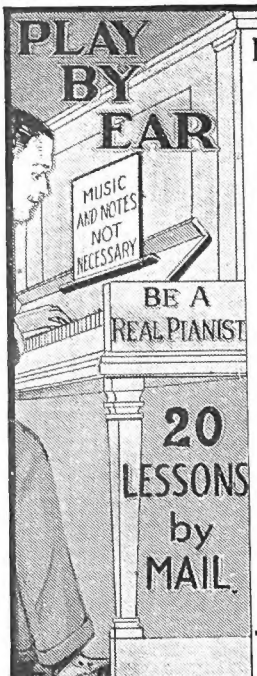
8% Yearly Dividends

You are guaranteed an 8 per cent yearly increase in value on all exchanges. You can also earn a 6 per cent bonus. The book tells how.

Write Today

Send your name and address today—NOW. You will be under no obligation. You will receive our 128-page diamond book by the next mail. Send your name and address **NOW** to Dept. 109E

J·M·LYON & CO.
1 Maiden Lane, New York, N. Y.



Be a Jazz Music Master

Yes, you can, even if you have never touched a piano. The Niagara School of Music has perfected a method of instruction which will enable you to play all the popular song hits perfectly by ear. All you need to know is how to hum a tune. Our method—only 20 lessons, which you can master in a little while—will enable you to transform the tune which is running through your head into actual JAZZY music on the piano. All by ear.

It Is Easy To Learn

Many masters of Jazz and Ragtime music don't know a note. Be a Music Master yourself. It is easy—the lessons interesting and simple—no tedious ding-dong daily practice with the *do, re, mi* until you think you will go crazy—not at all—just 20 brief, entertaining lessons and you have a musical ability at which your friends will marvel. You simply play by ear.

Hum the Tune, Play it by Ear

Hear a new popular song hit, hum the tune, play it yourself. All by ear. Just think how many dull hours this easily acquired ability will make happy—how many friends you will make happy—how popular you will be when you JAZZ the newest song success of Broadway after hearing it. All done by ear.

Be a **Jazz Music Master** and enjoy life. Send for our free booklet, "The Niagara Method," today. It is brimful of interesting and live matter.

NIAGARA SCHOOL OF MUSIC
Niagara Falls, N. Y.

MAIL THIS TO-DAY
Dept. 193

Without obligation to me, please mail to address below, your booklet, "The Niagara Method."

Name .....

Street .....

City ..... State .....

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The Secret of Being a Convincing Talker

How I Learned It in One Evening

By George Raymond

"HAVE you heard the news about Frank Jordan?"

This question quickly brought me to the little group which had gathered in the center of the office. Jordan and I had started with the Great Eastern Machinery Co., within a month of each other, four years ago. A year ago, Jordan was taken into the accounting division and I was sent out as salesman. Neither of us was blessed with an unusual amount of brilliancy, but we "got by" in our new jobs well enough to hold them.

Imagine my amazement then, when I heard:

"Jordan's just been made Treasurer of the Company!"

I could hardly believe my ears. But there was the "Notice to Employees" on the bulletin board telling about Jordan's good fortune.

Now I knew that Jordan was a capable fellow, quiet, and unassuming, but I never would have picked him for any such sudden rise. I knew, too, that the Treasurer of the Great Eastern had to be a big man, and I wondered how in the world Jordan landed the place.

The first chance I got, I walked into Jordan's new office, and after congratulating him warmly, I asked him to let me "in" on the details of how he jumped ahead so quickly. His story is so intensely interesting that I am going to repeat it as closely as I remember.

"I'll tell you just how it happened, George, because you may pick up a pointer or two that will help you.

"You remember how scared I used to be whenever I had to talk to the chief? You remember how you used to tell me that every time I opened my mouth I put my foot into it, meaning of course that every time I spoke I got into trouble? You remember when Ralph Sinton left to take charge of the Western office and I was asked to present him with the loving cup the boys gave him, how flustered I was and how I couldn't say a word because there were people around? You remember how confused I used to be every time I met new people? I couldn't say what I wanted to say when I wanted to say it: and I determined that if there was any possible chance to learn how to talk I was going to do it.

"The first thing I did was to buy a number of books on public speaking, but they seemed to be meant for those who wanted to become orators, whereas what I wanted to learn was not only how to speak in public but how to speak to individuals under various conditions in business and social life.

"A few weeks later, just as I was about to give up hope of ever learning how to talk interestingly, I read an announcement stating that Dr. Frederick Houk Law had just completed a new course in business talking and public speaking entitled 'Mastery of Speech.' The course was offered on approval without money in advance, so since I had nothing whatever to lose by examining the lessons, I sent for them and in a few days they arrived. I glanced through the entire eight lessons, reading the headings and a few paragraphs here and there, and in about an hour the whole secret of effective speaking was opened to me.

"For example, I learned why I had always lacked confidence, why talking had always seemed something to be dreaded whereas it is really the simplest thing in the world to 'get up and talk.' I learned how to secure complete attention to what I was saying and how to make everything I said interesting, forceful and convincing. I learned the art of listening, the value of silence, and the power of brevity. Instead of being funny at the wrong time, I learned how and when to use humor with telling effect.

"But perhaps the most wonderful thing about the lessons were the actual examples of what things to say and when to say them to meet every condition. I found that there was a knack in making oral reports to my superiors. I found that there was a right way and a wrong way to present complaints, to give estimates, and to issue orders.

"I picked up some wonderful pointers about how to give my opinions, about how to answer complaints, about how to ask the bank for a loan, about how to ask for extensions. Another thing that struck me forcibly was that instead of antagonizing people when I didn't agree with them, I learned how to bring them around to my way of thinking in the most pleasant sort of way. Then, of course, along with those lessons there were chapters on speaking before large audiences, how to find material for talking and speaking, how to talk to friends, how to talk to servants, and how to talk to children.

"Why, I got the secret the very first evening and it was only a short time before I was able to apply all of the principles and found that my words were beginning to have an almost magical effect upon everybody to whom I spoke. It seemed that I got things done instantly, where formerly, as you know, what I said 'went in one ear and out of the other.' I began to acquire an executive ability that surprised me. I smoothed out difficulties like a true diplomat. In my talks with the chief I spoke clearly, simply, convincingly. Then came my first promotion since I entered the accounting department. I was given the job of answering complaints, and I made good. From that I was given the job of making collections. When Mr. Buckley joined the Officers' Training Camp, I was made Treasurer. Between you and me, George, my salary is now $7,500 a year and I expect it will be more from the first of the year.

"And I want to tell you sincerely that I attribute my success solely to the fact that I learned how to talk to people."

*****

When Jordan finished, I asked him for the address of the publishers of Dr. Law's course, and he gave it to me. I sent for it and found it to be exactly as he had stated. After studying the eight simple lessons I began to sell to people who had previously refused to listen to me at all. After four months of record-breaking sales during the dullest season of the year, I received a wire from the chief asking me to return to the home office. We had quite a long talk in which I explained how I was able to break sales records—and I was appointed Sales Manager at almost twice my former salary. I know that there was nothing in me that had changed except that I had acquired the ability to talk where formerly I simply used "words without reason." I can never thank Jordan enough for telling me about Dr. Law's Course in Business Talking and Public Speaking. Jordan and I are both spending all our spare time making public speeches on war subjects and Jordan is being talked about now as Mayor of our little Town.

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IN THE days when beaver fur was king in St. Louis settlement, a man brought word from the high Rockies of a country where boiling springs shot water a hundred feet toward the clouds and Indians owned caves of red paint He was *Jim Bridger*, discoverer of Great Salt Lake and the Yellowstone. And in "Kings of the Missouri" Hugh Pendexter takes you back into that unexplored land with *Bridger* and his band of Rocky Mountain Men. A four-part story beginning in our next issue.

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Adventure

Vol. 26
No. 2

July 18, 1920

"HASHKNIFE"—PHILANTHROPIST

A Complete Novelette

by

W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "Ike Harper's Historical Holiday," "When the Pilgrims Hit Piperock," etc.

I DON'T know who "Toothpick" Thompson was or is, but he must 'a' been a miserable sort of a whippoorwill to incur the enmity of a smiling soul like "Hashknife" Hartley.

Hashknife is what you'd call a lovable character with a purpose in life, said purpose being the finding of said Toothpick. With this one exception Hashknife loves everybody, but packs his gun handy for those who might misconstrue his devotion.

Hashknife never did tell me what Toothpick done to him, but it must 'a' been something gosh-awful. I can get a rise out of Hashknife any old time by asking him for a toothpick, but he never has said what he intended doing to this splinter-named individual.

"Going to hang his hide on the fence?" I asks.

"Whatcha reckon I'm going to do—kiss him?"

I've got so I keeps my eyes open for anybody which might fit the description, which consists of a he-human, a heap generous from end to end, but skimpy in circumference. Added description don't help much, 'cause Hashknife is likely prejudiced and anyway nobody'd print it. I never antagonizes Hashknife and I never intentionally starts any argument, but at times I foolishly makes some sort of a remark, and this is what happens:

"Aw shucks, 'Sleepy,' you've got the wrong idea entirely. Romance means meeting some female, making love to her by the old mill-stream, and eventually marrying her.

"I know, I know, cowboy; you're thinking of the days men wore iron panties and went around with a cant-hook in one hand and a skewer in the other. Uh-huh—sure. They was on the prod most of the time according to books, but you've got to figure that they had to do a little work once in a while.

"Yeah, they was romantic, Sleepy, but they must 'a' had toothache, bald heads and corns the same as me and you. You never reads no tales of cow-land wherein the buckaroo is ever troubled with them ailments or has to get up at five o'clock in the Winter to shovel hay at a lot of bawling cows. Romance is a great thing, Sleepy, but yuh can't be hungry or broke and be romantic at the same time."

Hashknife gasps with delight over that discourse. I marvels exceedingly that any human being can hold its breath so long.

"Hashknife," says I, "Bill Bryan never had anything on you except his platform. I wasn't kicking about there not being any romance left, but I was just remarking

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that nothing ever happens to us. Honest, we're getting in one awful rut."

Hashknife reins in his bronc and stares at me.

"Oh, yeah. Well, well. Me and you just got the powder-smoke out of our noses, and here you goes yelping about being in a rut. What would you advise?"

"No advice. I was just hoping that something would happen to us—something we ain't to blame for. *Sabe?*"

"Oh, yeah. Uh-huh. You'd like to have this grade slide off into the river or have a rattlesnake rise up and bite you or——"

P'wee! P'wee-e-e-e-e!

One of them bullets makes a merry-go-round out of my hat, and the other one makes Hashknife grab his nose.

P'wee-e-e-e-e-e! Splat!

Another one flattens on a rock behind us as we whirled our broncs off the road into a willow thicket. Then we hit the ground with our rifles in our hands and stares at each other.

"Somebody must 'a' heard you, Sleepy," grins Hashknife. "You talk too loud. Keep your head down."

"Take care of your own head," says I. "I never hired you as a head-guard."

We sneaks in behind some rocks and brush, and takes a look across the river. I reckon we've been there half an hour when we sees two men on a rock across the river. They appears to be a heap interested in the spot where we left our broncs. After a while one of 'em takes a shot in that direction.

Just then Hashknife's rifle cracks. I seen the shooter stumble to his knees, and his rifle comes skyhootin' plumb down into the river. The other feller ducks down and hauls his incapacitated friend out of sight.

"Whatcha laying there with a gun for, Sleepy?" asks Hashknife. "All you had to do was line up on the other feller and we'd got 'em both."

"Sure," says I, "and then we'd have to go over there and nurse 'em to some town. As it is one takes care of the other and we ain't under obligations to nobody."

"My ——!" he grunts. "You sure do look into the future. Won't shoot a man 'cause you're too lazy to bury him. My, my, you've got a heart."

Then we sneaked back to our broncs and went on. We ain't got no more idea of where we're going than a Piegan has of the pyramids.

Me and him goes along until circumstances causes us to stop, and then we eventually goes on again. We can ride anything you can hook a hull on to or rope to a certain extent, and are so danged peaceful that we're willing to cut one cinch off our saddles when we ride into a single-rig country.

Soldiers of fortune? Naw, sir, cow-punchers of disaster. Fortune never smiled at us. At times she's busted out laughing when we've doubled on our trail and left some anxious sheriff barking up a tree, but otherwise she's had her back turned to us.

Right now our combined wealth won't total over seventeen dollars. We've got two Winchesters, a .41 and a .44 Colt, and Hashknife packs a .44 derringer in his vest pocket.

Under us we've got two jug-headed broncs and two good saddles. My bronc's name is Gray Wolf and Hashknife's was christened El Diablo. Their mission in life is to pile somebody.

Our consciences are clear—enough to suit us, and we've got sense enough to go inside when it rains.

"Regular town," observes Hashknife as we tops a hill and gets a look at the settlement below us. "Got a main street, hitch-racks, houses, et cettery. Somebody's wagon must 'a' broke down here and so they decided to start a town.

"Court-house, jail and lots of saloons. Cause and effect, Sleepy. I see a café-sign, cowboy."

"Bar 80 on shoulder and Cross L on the hip," says I as we drift past two broncs at a rack. "Where did we hear anything about the Bar 80?"

"Wasn't it the Bar 80 that Pete McCool bragged so much about? Said it was the toughest outfit that Gawd ever let live. Remember it, don'tcha, Sleepy?"

"Uh, huh. Betcha forty dollars that this is Badger City. According to Pete New York is a deserted sheep-camp beside Badger City."

"She's that same li'l' place," agrees Hashknife as we swings down. "I see the name on the bank window. Let's see if their eggs are fresh." We leaves our broncs and starts for the door.

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TWO fellers comes out of the hash-house as we starts in. One of 'em is a tall individual with the longest mustache I ever seen. He packs his gun almost to his knee and he's got hair an inch long on his wrist.

The other one is a pig-headed-looking *hombre* with little round eyes and a little belly that sort of folds over the band of his pants. He's wearing store clothes and a hard hat, but you don't notice him so much as you do his watch-chain, which is made of twenty-dollar gold-pieces linked together. I counts ten of 'em, and his coat must hide that many more.

They steps to one side and stares at us. I never had anybody stare at me so hard before. We walks right past 'em and lands at the nearest table.

We glances outside and see them two meet another feller in the middle of the street. This third person starts talking with both hands, but the tall feller grabs him by the arm and the three of 'em crosses the street.

"What do you think, Sleepy?" asks Hashknife.

"About four hundred and fifty dollars."

"Where?"

"In that watch-chain."

"I didn't figure that, Sleepy. I was watching the tall feller's hands. Honest to gosh, they itched to grab a gun."

"Hunting boogers, eh?" says I. "Looking for tiger's teeth in a canary. Some of these days, Hashknife, you'll get bit by a chickadee."

Just then a feller comes out of the kitchen to take our order. He's a meek-looking *hombre* with a long lock of hair hanging down over his forehead, and an ancient cigaret is glued to the corner of his lower lip. He takes a look all around and then comes over to us.

"Pardner," says Hashknife, "can you deliver us about two dollars' worth of ham and eggs?"

"And fried spuds and coffee?" I adds.

"Yeah," says he. "Uh-huh; sure."

"Confirmed three times," grins Hashknife. "Hurry it along, will you?"

"Yeah," says he, brushing back the hair. "Uh-huh, sure."

"Man of few words—all meaning the same," says Hashknife.

He delivers us the feed and then ducks back into the kitchen. He comes out in time to collect, and Hashknife asks him who the feller with the gaudy chain is.

"That's Abe Spooner, the prosecuting attorney, and the other one is Bill Ells, the sheriff. I hope they both die before their time comes."

He shuffles back to the kitchen, and me and Hashknife looks at each other.

"My ——!" says Hashknife. "This is awful! Abe Spooner and Bill Ells! Well, well!"

"You know who they are?"

"No, but they must be awful, Sleepy. They've scared the cook."

"You scared?"

"Y' betcha. Got a notion to sneak out the back way and run like ——! You scared too, Sleepy?"

"Yeah—scared I won't inherit that chain."

Somehow them two *hombres* seems to be waiting for us in that saloon. The sheriff is leaning against the bar, while the prosecutor sets on a card-table sort of fussing with his watch-chain nervous-like.

A couple of punchers are playing pool, and a third one—the feller who met them out in the street—is trying to make a little yellow dog do tricks. This last puncher is about seven-eighths drunk.

Me and Hashknife braces up to the bar and calls for cigars. We took hooch in a strange town just once; now we takes cigars.

"Nice weather we're having," says Hashknife pleasant-like.

"Up to now," admits the sheriff.

He don't look bad to me. Any time yuh find a *hombre* who ties his holster down—well, anyway, they don't live long.

"Dang fool dawg won't do nothin'!" complains the puncher, flopping his arms nervous-like. "Want to show him off and he won't do a darn thing. Teached that dawg myself. Want to see him play dead?"

"Shut up!" snaps the sheriff. "Dog's got more sense than you have."

"Thasso?"

The puncher gets woolly.

"Well, well! Let's have a drink. Still got money left and more where that comes from; eh, sheriff?"

"Shut up!" howls the sheriff, yanking him around and shoving him out on the sidewalk.

They has a few words and then the puncher weaves back across the street. Then the sheriff comes back in.

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"My, you sure know how to razoo a feller, don'tcha?" applauds Hashknife.

"You're the sheriff, ain'tcha?"

"I am. Why?"

"Nothing much, but being as you're the sheriff I thought maybe you'd like to know that somebody shoots at me and my pardner as we rides up the road."

"Did, eh?"

The sheriff shows interest and so does Spooner.

"Somebody shot at you?" asks Spooner wondering-like.

"Right at us," grins Hashknife. "Whatcha know about that?"

"Did you—uh—see either of them?" asks Spooner.

"Did I say it was two men? Now, maybe I did."

Spooner swallers hard and scratches his chin.

"Seen 'em both," nods Hashknife, plastering down the loose wrapper on his cigar. "Shot one. Left the other intact to bring in the body. Funny thing; you know it? Feller ought to know how to shoot before he tries such didoes as that, don'tcha think?"

"You telling me the truth?" asks the sheriff.

Hashknife grins into his eyes for a moment and then half-turns away. I knew what was coming 'cause I've seen it before—a pivot punch.

It caught the sheriff at the butt of his left ear, and for the next half-minute that sheriff was as dead to the world as if he had spent seven million years in a cemetery.

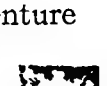
Spooner almost falls off the table, and the two pool-players stops their game sudden like.

"He doubted my word," says Hashknife, rubbing his knuckles. "He didn't show good judgment."

I was watching things—me. I seen the bartender, who is standing sort of behind Hashknife, reverse a bottle in his hand, and my bullet sure ruined one good quart of corn-juice.

"Aw-w-w-w-w-w!" wails the bartender, wiping his eyes. "Whatcha do that for?"

"Put your hands on the bar," says I. "Next time you might remember that the top end of a bottle is the neck—not the handle."



THE sheriff heaves a big sigh and then sets up. He moves his head like one of them mechanical doll things, and then he squints up at us. Man, I hankered for a chance to tie his mustache behind his neck. He sort of masticates slow-like, and gets to his feet.

"You . . . hit . . . me?" he asks, gawping at Hashknife.

"Yeah. It pains me to have my word doubted."

"I didn't doubt your word, stranger."

"My, I'm glad," says Hashknife.

"Honest I am. I sure accepts your apology, and I feels that we're going to get along fine. I ain't never had a sheriff for a friend.

"I kinda like your friend here—this one with the visible watch-chain. Name's Spooner, ain't it? Nice name. What does he do for a living?"

"I am the prosecuting attorney," says Spooner.

"Well, well! I thought you owned the mint. I apologize—to the mint."

"You looking for trouble?" asks the sheriff. " 'Cause if you are——"

"I should say not," says Hashknife. "Not us. Me and Sleepy are two little doves setting on a olive-branch. Live and let live, say we.

"Yuh see, Sleepy just busted that bottle on general princicples. He's so strong for temperance that he just has to bust booze."

"Yeah?" says the sheriff, feeling of his jaw. "Yeah?"

He walks to the door and looks back.

"About a mile below here," says Hashknife. "They was across the river."

The sheriff grunts something and walks out, and behind him goes Spooner, looking back all the way. One of the punchers puts down his cue and walks over to us.

"Gents," says he, "I'll buy. I never seen anything better in my life. I just needed one ball to beat 'Slim,' and when you hit Ells I picked up the ball and put it in my own pocket. I'll buy you a drink and a cigar for your pardner."

"I've backslid," says I, "so we'll cancel the cigar."

"Something with 'U. S. Revenue' stamped on the cork," says Hashknife, "and I'll open it myself."

"You're the doctor," says the bartender.

"I ain't suspicious, you understand,"

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grins Hashknife, "but I've got to stick in this vale of tears a while. You know a *hombre* by the name of Toothpick Thompson?"

The bartender shakes his head, and so does the two punchers.

"Never heard of him," says one of the boys. "I'm Al Stingle, and this is Slim Smith. The best thing Slim does is play pool."

"You skin me every danged time," complains Slim.

"Me and Slim works for the Cross L outfit. In fact we're about all that is left of the outfit; ain't we, Slim?"

"That's awful true," nods Slim sad-like. "Wouldn't be surprized to wake up any morning and find that we've been stolen. Cows just sort of e-vaporate—why not punchers?"

"That tells it," nods Al. "E-vaporation. You fellers looking for jobs?"

"Know anything about the Bar 80?" asks Hashknife.

"Bar 80?" asks Slim. "Oh, yeah, we know something about 'em. It ain't Bar 80 no more—it's the JHE outfit. About a year ago they changes the brand."

"Anything wrong about that?" asks Hashknife.

"——, no. They lets us alone and we lets them alone, but they don't get any love-notes from us, being as they're the snake-hunters what sent Shorty Blewett to the pen. Didn't know Shorty, did you? No? Well, they grabbed Shorty and sent him up for five years—on JHE evidence."

"Shorty worked with you fellers?"

"Uh-huh. Shorty got a idea he could find out how the cows were being rustled, and he—well, the darn fool got caught."

"That's what they said," corrects Al. "Shorty wasn't no rustler. It was a dirty deal, if you asks me."

"Where did they get the idea for the JHE brand?"

"Eastern outfit, I reckon. Brill is supposed to own it."

"Brill?" asks Hashknife.

"Yeah. He's a cowman all right," says Slim. "They brands all the Bar 80 stuff over again. Me and Al has a couple of Bar 80 saddle-horses."

"Cross L loses lot of stock?" asks Hashknife.

"About all they've got," says Slim. "Every month is like a hard Winter. The old man—Jack Older, our boss—has lost about thirty-five hundred head.

"I'd 'a' killed somebody a long time ago if it belonged to me. Why, he's just set around and let somebody annex all his wealth. How the —— it's done I dunno, but she's being done, stranger."

"Anybody else losing stock?"

"Yeah. The Lazy U has lost about all they owned, and the JHE has been hoodled out of a lot. It's some system, I'd tell a man."

"Whatcha reckon them fellers shot at us for?" asks Hashknife.

"Told anybody you was coming?" asks Slim.

"Didn't know it ourselves."

"This is one peculiar country," admits Al. "If I was you I'd look out a little when you're around the sheriff. I know you fellers are plumb weaned from milk, but Ells is a bad *hombre* to cross."

"How about Spooner?" I asks.

"Coyote," grins Al. "Never packs a gun. Only thing that saves him. Run out to the Cross L and visit us. Old man likes company—the kind you don't have to keep your gun handy for. So-long."

"Now," says Hashknife, "I wonder what that feller over in that doorway is staring at us for? Lordy, a side-show would coin money in a place like this, where they gawps so hard at a ordinary he-man. Now he's coming over to see us. Maybe he's near-sighted, Sleepy."

THE feller is a tall, rangy-looking *hombre* with mouse-colored hair and a slight limp in his left hind leg. He pilgrims up in front of us and stares at Hashknife.

"Howdy," says Hashknife. "Nice weather."

"Uh-huh. You wishin' to get jobs?"

"Have to wish for 'em?" asks Hashknife innocent-like.

The feller fingers his chin and glances across the street.

"I need a couple of good men. I own the JHE outfit."

"All of it?"

"I said I was the owner."

"I'm kinda hard of hearing," says Hashknife. "Didn't that used to was the Bar 80?"

"Uh-huh."

"Whatcha say your name was—is?"

"My name is Brill."

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"Brill? Used to be a feller down Pecos way by that name. You related to him?"

"I don't know—for sure."

"You don't know much of anything for sure—do yúh?"

He stares at Hashknife, and I can see Brill's ears get red.

"I reckon you don't want them jobs," says he soft-like.

"Not if we has to wish for them. Didja ever hear the story about the old couple and the fairy? The old lady was having a hard time trying to make the old coffee-mill work. Fairy shows up and tells 'em she'll grant three wishes. The old lady ain't very far-sighted; so she up and wishes for a new coffee-mill.

"That makes the old man sore as —— to think of wasting one whole wish, and he up and says:

" 'That's a —— of a wish! I wish you had it hanging on the end of your nose!'

"See what he done? Well, they had to use up the third wish to get that coffee-mill loose."

"What has a fairy-tale got to do with me?" asks Brill.

"Thisaway," explains Hashknife. "Somebody—it wasn't no fairy—says to you—

" 'I wish you to give them two pelicans some jobs on the JHE.'

"That's one wish. *Sabe?* Then you asks us to wish for them jobs, which accounts for wish number two.

"Now supposing we all gets our wish? There's still one wish coming, ain't there?

"Sure is, and I want to tell you this: Me or you or your fairy-friend is going to use up that third wish—wishing to —— that they hadn't never wished. See what I mean?"

"I sure don't," states Brill. "Do you or don't you want them jobs?"

"We ain't wishing today, Mister Brill."

"Of course you *sabe* your own business," says he, making a toothpick out of a match and picking his yellow teeth. That toothpick makes Hashknife sore.

"Do we?" he snaps. "Well, by the horns on the moon, we never came to this hay-wire hamlet to ask anybody about it. I reckon we'll wiggle along in spite of our business."

"In spite of it," nods Brill. "Some business is a handicap."

"Not when she's your own and you mind it!" snaps Hashknife.

We seen Spooner just inside the door of the building across the street as Brill went inside.

"I hope you're getting satisfaction, Sleepy," grins Hashknife. "It appears that things are happening—things we never started. Beginning to feel romantic, cowboy. What do you think?"

"I think I'd like to play a game of pool to settle my nerves."

We plays a few games, but it ain't much fun when you've got to keep one eye on a hostile bartender and the other on a pool-ball, so we finally decides to stable our broncs and find a place to hive up. We meets the sheriff at the door, and he steps to one side to let us out.

"Still here, eh?" says he, trying to appear friendly.

"Yeah," admits Hashknife. "We can't deny it, sheriff."

"Figure on staying long?"

"Let me see."

Hashknife counts on his fingers.

"July, August, September, October, Nov— Election is in November, ain't it?"

"Going to run for office?"

"No-o-o-o-o, I just wants to vote for a candidate."

"Who?"

"The man who runs against you."

"Say, what in —— are you driving at?" he snaps. "Seems to me that you're mixing into things that don't concern you. You can't run this town. *Sabe?*"

"Naw, sir," grins Hashknife. "You've got the wrong idea. She don't need running, but she sure does need cleaning. Whatcha want us to go to work for the JHE for?"

"Whatcha talking about?"

He glares at us and hooks his thumbs into his belt.

"What do I know about the JHE and your jobs?"

"Some mustache," says I, thinking out loud. "What do you do when you want to eat? Pin 'em to your ears?"

"None of your —— business! If I was you I'd drift real sudden."

"You would," nods Hashknife; "but we ain't that kind of whippoorwills. There ain't no hay-wire about us. Let's go and see what the stage drug in."

There's a crowd around the stage. The sheriff horns right in behind us, and everybody seems to be talking at once. There's a wounded man and a tale of how some

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bushwhacker shot from the top of the hill. They gets a doctor and fusses over him.

"Going along nice as you please when somebody shoots down at us and Sam keels over," explains the driver.

"Shooting from above you?" asks Hashknife, turning away from looking at the wounded man.

"Said so, didn't I? I seen the smoke from his gun."

"Must 'a' had a long-barreled gun with a crook at the end," grins Hashknife.

"What do you mean?" asks the driver mean-like.

"Bullet went in low and comes out high. You should have said you was on top of the hill and the bushwhacker was below."

"Sheriff, will you herd this crowd outside?" asks the doctor. "I can't do a danged thing with all this shoving around."

There's plenty of talk out there on the sidewalk, but the driver sort of shuts up since Hashknife called him. The wounded man ain't very popular, being as he's sort of a gunman.

"Going after the bushwhacker, sheriff?" asks somebody.

The sheriff is looking at me and Sleepy, and don't answer the question. Pretty soon he jerks his head sideways and starts up the sidewalk, and we saunters along behind him.

We walks into his office, and he nods toward a pair of chairs. We places 'em against the wall and ain't no more than got seated when here comes Spooner. He peers back up the street and eases himself into a chair.

THE sheriff fusses with some papers for a while, and then—

"How much?"

"How much what?" asks Hashknife, looking up from rolling a smoke.

"Every man has a price."

"Yeah? Suppose you go ahead and talk a little."

"Don't say too much," advises Spooner.

"Of course we know who shot Sam Peele."

"Sure we do," nods Spooner.

"You can't pay me for it," grins Hashknife. "I sell no scalps."

"Who in —— wants to pay you for it?" grunts the sheriff. "My ——, you two get on my nerves! What's it worth to you fellers to get out and stay out?"

"Oh," says Hashknife, glancing at me. "What's it worth to you?"

"I'm buying—not selling," says the sheriff. "Of course if the price is too high——"

"Wait a minute," says Spooner, getting to his feet as the sheriff starts to finish. "There ain't no use of anybody going off half-cocked. Now the question is this: How much is Crosby paying you? Or does your pay come from somebody else?"

"Whatcha want to know for?" asks Hashknife.

"If you don't know the ante you can't raise it, can you?"

"Got any certain price in mind?" I asks.

"No," says the sheriff. "We didn't figure on——"

"Talk it over," advises Hashknife. "We'll stable our broncs and maybe by that time you'll be able to talk without swallering all the time."

We walks out of there and strolls up the sidewalk.

"I hope your romantic soul is getting satisfaction, cowboy," says Hashknife. "I'd sure hate to sell out to them two, but if the price is right I reckon we better."

"Sell out what, Hashknife?"

"Nothing. We ain't got nothing, have we? Well, if the price is right we'll sell out—tha's all."

Just then a girl comes out of a store ahead of us and starts up the street. She's got a lot of bundles in her arms and seems in a hurry.

The puncher who had been trying to make his dog do tricks is just tying his bronc to a rack, but when he sees her he steps up on the walk in front of her. She sort of draws away and tries to walk around him, but he seems to want to talk to her.

"Wait a minute, can't you?" he asks, taking hold of her arm.

Man, she let one hand loose from her packages and slapped him a dandy. She started to run, but he grabbed her again and she lost her packages.

Somebody across the street laughs out loud, and I sort of estimate how high to hold to cut off his belt-buckle when Hashknife collides with Mister Puncher. I know that said puncher went to the Land of Nod in one blaze of glory, 'cause Hashknife hit me once by mistake.

Then Hashknife proceeds to pick him up

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by the heels and drags him over to a hitch-rack, where he takes the feller's rope and hangs him upside down. There he hangs, sleeping sweetly, with his soles pointing at the sky. The population seems to sort of gather around wondering-like, and gazes upon this painless lynching.

One feller—a gambler by his raiment—steps up and says:

"What has Ben done now?"

Hashknife ignores the question and takes off his hat to the girl.

"Ma'am, may I walk home with you?" he asks.

"No, I hardly think so," says she. "I live about five miles out."

Somebody sort of snickers and then shuts up sudden-like when Hashknife turns. Then he turns back to the girl and picks up her bundles.

"I thank you just the same," says she. "You are very kind."

"Tha's all right," grins Hashknife. "I don't reckon anybody's going to bother you again."

"Just the same I thank you," says she, and we stood there and watched her climb into a buggy and pull out of town.

Then we turns back to the crowd. Bennie has woke up and is protesting considerable. The sheriff and Spooner are there, acting like they wished an explanation.

"Mind telling what you done that to Bennie for?" asks the sheriff.

"If that upside-down drunken pup is Bennie I'll say this much: He got too fresh with a lady," answers Hashknife.

"Who was the lady?" asks the sheriff.

"Crosby's girl," says somebody, "Molly Crosby."

"I never done a danged thing!" wails Bennie. "Ain't somebody going to let me loose?"

"I will," says the sheriff, but Hashknife steps right into him.

"Better reflect," says Hashknife. "I ain't never heard of angels with flowing mustaches like yours, but so help me ——, if you let him loose until I tell you to there will be something new for Saint Peter to pass upon."

A lot of the folks seem shocked, but they don't lose their presence of mind enough to not get out of the line of possible fire. Hashknife has got more lines on his face than an ancient Siwash when he sets his poker face to work, and the sheriff steps back.

"You running this town?" he asks, sort of twitching his fingers.

"No-o-o-o-o. No, I ain't running nothing—not even my legs. I tied that *hombre* upside down because I figured he had more brains in his feet than in his head and some of 'em might trickle down. *Sabe?*"

Hashknife is a clever sort of a person, but plumb lax about small details. For instance, he forgot to take Bennie's gun away from him.

I ain't clever. I don't look ahead and get all worried to —— over what might happen, but I sure do appear to be animated in the immediate present. I hated to shoot at a man when he is standing on his shoulders, but what was there to do? A sidewinder ain't no object of pity just because somebody is standing on its tail, is it? Answer—no. That is why I shot right at the spot between Bennie's eyes.

I'm a rotten shot. Yeah, I missed. That bullet hit into the dust right at Bennie's ear, and the spray of dust and gravel spoiled him for anything except the sense of touch for twenty minutes.

Bennie dropped his gun and grabbed his eyes, and I turned just as Hashknife's derringer explodes. I saw a puncher sort of leaning over, rubbing his wrist and staring down at his gun on the ground.

"Hoss liniment is good for it," says Hashknife. "I've done that to so many persons that I know the remedy. I really don't want anybody to fool with Bennie. *Sabe?*"

"You're going a little too far," says the sheriff. "That man you tied to the rack is Ben Lober, foreman of the JHE outfit."

"Pshaw," says Hashknife contrite-like. "I apologize—to the rack."

"Why don't you arrest him?" asks the gambler person.

"None of your danged business! I'll run my own office."

"Sure you will," admits Hashknife. "Just like a coyote running a poultry business."

The sheriff stares at Hashknife and Hashknife stares right back at him while the crowd sort of slides back and waits for the killing. I reckon that Ells ain't noways used to Hashknife's kind.

"THE party is over," says Hashknife sweet-like, "and I'll let anybody cut Bennie down."

"Leave him there!" snaps Ells, turning

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on his heel. "He's been getting too danged smart lately, anyway."

The crowd sort of melts away, talking to themselves, and then we sort of takes notice of the puncher with the bum wrist.

"Pick it up," grins Hashknife, pointing at the gun. "It won't bite yuh."

"Much obliged," says he. "I don't know how in —— you done it, stranger, but I sure knows how she feels. You slammed that bullet right in between the cylinder and the barrel, and danged near busted my wrist. Betcha you drove my wrist-bones back an inch. Some shooting."

"Glad you appreciates it," grins Hashknife. "You a friend of Bennie's?"

"Well, I reckon I thought I was. I ain't now."

"Working for the JHE?"

"Got fired yesterday."

"Know anything about old man Crosby?"

"Uh-huh. Runs the Lazy U. Sort of a religious old coot. Trusts his daughter and the Lord. Wonder why Spooner didn't have nothing to say, being as he's sort of shining around Molly Crosby."

"Know anything about Shorty Blewett?"

"Little. Hear he was going with Molly, but they sent him up for rustling."

"Much obliged. Now, about that Lazy U brand: Is she sort of a little stirrup-looking U, laying on her side, with the points sticking north on a cow going south?"

"Well—" the puncher scratches his head and grins—"well, I reckon she just about answers that description. Yes, sir, she's that kind of a mark."

"Thanks," nods Hashknife, and I follers him off down the street, listening to Bennie's gentle voice raised in spasmodic profanity.

"Hashknife," says I, "was you kidding that poor devil?"

"She wasn't such a bad-looking lady, Sleepy," says he, looking straight ahead. "Kinda nice, I'd say. Lot of sense, y' betcha. Slapped Bennie right in the egg-chute. Yeah, I'd say she ain't no frail little blossom."

"All right," says I; "don't answer my questions. You ignore my questions all the time in spite of the fact that I saves your life. You didn't show a lick of sense, Hashknife, when you forgot Bennie's gun thataway."

"Great men all make mistakes, Sleepy. Didja just aim to dust him?"

"Did you shoot at that feller's gun, Hashknife?"

"Think I'm crazy?"

"No," says I, "and I don't care to have you wish insanity on me either."

I sees Spooner come angling across the street toward the sheriff's office and we sort of catches a signal to foller him in.

"You —— fool, are you going in there?" I asks. "Ain'cha got no sense?"

"Sure have and am, Sleepy. Come on."

They was waiting for us, and we places our chairs against the wall, facing the door.

"Thought it over?" asks Ells soft-like.

"Kinda," admits Hashknife. "You're talking."

Spooner leans toward us and whispers—

"How about five hundred?"

Hashknife puckers up his lips and then shakes his head.

"Apiece," says Ells. "We ain't pikers."

"Pocket money," says Hashknife. "You know what it means."

Ells drums on his table for a moment and then turns to Spooner.

"Think we can raise the ante, Spooner?"

"If they'll leave right now we'll make it—one—thousand—apiece."

"That's a regular bet," says Hashknife. "We'll call yuh."

"I'll get it," says Spooner nervous-like. "You set right here."

He pilgrims out, and the three of us sets there waiting. After a while Ells says—

"What guarantee have we got that you'll stay away?"

"Oh, yeah," says Hashknife. "The guarantee. Not any, sheriff, except that we play a square game—in a square game. Me and my pardner plays our cards off the top of the deck until we finds that it ain't customary."

"The doctor don't think that Sam Peele will pull through."

"We don't know him," says Hashknife, "so his demise don't irritate us none."

"Funny thing," says Ells, "but I don't know your names."

"That's all right," grins Hashknife. "You're going to pay cash, ain't yuh?"

Just then Spooner edges inside and walks over to the table. A couple of punchers rides past, going out of town, and Spooner turns until they're out of sight. Then he digs inside his coat and hauls out two bundles.

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"Thousand in each bunch," says he. "Count 'em."

"Your word is good," says Hashknife. "Make any difference which way we leave town?"

"Better go the way you came," says Ells. "The JHE is the other way, and maybe somebody turned Bennie loose by this time."

We didn't even tell them good-by. We shook the dust of Badger City off our feet as fast as possible.

"John D. Vanderbilt," says I, as we tops the first rise, "what in —— did we have that was worth a thousand dollars?"

Hashknife swings off the road and leads me up a little coulée for a hundred yards off the road. Then he turns in his saddle and grins at me.

"Darned if I know, cowboy. Ain't it romantic? But I know this much: They don't intend to let us enjoy it."

"Is that so? We've got it, ain't we? Why won't we enjoy it?"

"I didn't say we wouldn't enjoy it, Sleepy; I said they didn't intend to let us. You don't look ahead none. Didja see them two punchers what rode out of town when Spooner came in?"

"Uh-huh. Where's the cloud effect?"

"Down the road. Spooner and Ells ain't giving away two thousand dollars. If we went down there we'd stand as much show as a celluloid dog chasing an asbestos cat through ——. One of 'em is Bennie Lober."

"What will we do—cut across the hills?"

"Safest thing to do, Sleepy, but I hate to do it. Let's hide out here until Spooner and Ells ride past."

"What makes you think——"

"Cinch. Spooner has got to have some reason for drawing two thousand. Reckon he said he was going to buy cows or something. *Sabe?* We holds him up. Sheriff is with him and plugs us proper. Sheriff takes the responsibility off the bush-whackers."

"Too far-fetched," says I. "You've got the imagination of a hop-head."

"Yeah? Here comes Ells and Spooner."

They swings past us and off down the road, and then Hashknife leads back to the road and points toward town.

"We ain't left nothing," says I. "Why go back?"

"To leave something, Sleepy," he grins. "Going to put two thousand in the bank."

"In . . . the . . . bank? Us?"

"Yeah. Romantic, don't you think?"

"Romantic——! Insanity! Absolutely the craziest idea I ever heard."

THERE ain't no use arguing with him. He's good-hearted up to a certain point, and after that he begins to get childish.

He knowed how to transact the business; so I gave him my bundle. It was a sad affair for me.

Then we just got on to our broncs as the sheriff, the prosecutor and the other two ride in. Man, you'd 'a' thought we'd just robbed the bank instead of putting money in it. Questions and answers were null and void.

Their first offering of lead seemed to connect with Gray Wolf and he dropped like a log. I lit flat on my back in the dust, but I got my Winchester loose as I turned over, and proceeded to crawl close to my supine bronc.

I seen Hashknife fading out in a cloud of dust, and then I organizes for action. One of the punchers has got inside a saloon across the street, another in behind a wagon in front of the blacksmith shop on the same side of the street.

I seen Spooner duck down at the end of the board sidewalk, but I can't see anything of the sheriff. A bullet cuts a nice crease across the fender of my saddle, and it makes me sore. I picks on that wagon first, and the man behind just stands for five shots, after which he crawls behind the shop, dragging one leg.

Spooner can't do no shooting without exposing himself; so I transfers my affections to the saloon window, where the other feller is shooting at me. I sure fanned that palace of sin a plenty.

I busted every window in the front of the place and then I proceeds to cut my initials in the front door. All I've got left is the period when I sees Spooner duck low and try to make a sneak.

I had only one shell left in the gun, and when I cut loose I seen Spooner do a high-dive on his head.

"Hope I didn't ruin that watch-chain," says I out loud, and a voice behind me says——

"Lay down that gun!"

It's Brill. He sneaked up on me from

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the rear. I crawls away from my rifle and unhooks my belt.

"Got him, Bill," says Brill, and then Ells comes across the street.

He glares at me and then at Brill.

"I'd have killed him," says he mean-like, "but you beat me to it."

"You're a nice little sheriff," says I. "They ought to trade your jail for a cemetery."

"Where did the other one go?" asks Brill.

"Got away!" snaps Ells. "We'll get him, too."

Badger City sure comes down to escort me to durance vile. My, they sure was brave and bold to take a chance thataway. They not only hoodled me to jail, but they abused me considerable.

"What was the matter, sheriff?" asks a feller who looks like he might have been inside that saloon.

"Held up Spooner and took two thousand dollars. This is one of the fellers who bushed Sam Peele."

"Spooner's got a creased head," states somebody, "and Ben Lober's got a busted leg."

"That gray bronc is up again," informs another. "Got creased. Whatcha want done with him, sheriff?"

"Put him in my corral, Ed."

They hustles me into a cell, and then the sheriff herds everybody outside. He comes over to the bars and glares at me.

"Where is that money?" he asks.

"In the bank."

"In the bank?"

He looks foolish-like at me, and I nods.

"Give me the book!"

"Whatcha think I am—a schoolhouse?"

Just then Spooner comes in. Two other fellers tries to horn in, but the sheriff orders 'em out.

Spooner is a sorry-looking fat man. He's got a big muffler tied around his head, and his face is plumb gory.

"Get 'em both, Ells?" he asks, holding his head with both hands.

"Just one. You better see a doctor."

"Oh, —— the doctor!" he groans. "Where is the money? The boys are talking of a lynching, and I hoped we had 'em both. Where's the money, I asked you?"

"What boys?"

"What's the difference? I asked about the money, Bill."

Just then comes a plaintive sort of a voice from near the door:

"Money ain't everything, Spooner. Feller hadn't ought to get to loving money so much that he forgets to square-deal his feller men. It sure is a nice thing to give away your money, but you spoils the whole thing when you tries to commit murder to get it back."

I sees Spooner and the sheriff whirl around, and then their hands go up slow.

"Two Y's in a row," says Hashknife's voice. "Where's my pardner?"

"In the little coop on the left," says I. "Locked up like a gate."

"Unlock it," orders Hashknife, "and don't look so bilious, sheriff."

It sure wrenched their souls to see me walk out of there, and it hurt a lot worse when I took away their guns.

"You'll never get away," says Ells, and Hashknife grins.

"Thasso? Well, well! Sleepy, we'll take their hats, and that drunken gang won't never know us."

"That hat cost me twenty-five dollars," wails Ells. "You——"

"Aw, shut up!" yelps Hashknife. "Get into that cell—both of yuh!"

Hashknife takes the keys and locks the cell door.

"There's going to be a lynching tonight," says I. "Them uncurried wolves are going to get lit up proper-like and then they're going to come down here."

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" chuckles Hashknife. "Shall we stay and see the fun?"

"Nope. The fun will come in the morning when they discovers their mistake."

"Gents," says Spooner, "upon my word of honor——"

"My ——!" gasps Hashknife. "Wouldn't that rasp yuh? Honor! Where is your bronc, Sleepy?"

"In the sheriff's corral. You get him, will you? You look like Ells in that hat."

Then Ells began to curse me and Spooner begins to plead. Spooner was willing to do anything or promise anything if I'd let him out, but Ells cursed me and my ancestors from the beginning of time.

Then Spooner chides Ells for crabbing his chance of touching my heart, and then they lays off me and practises on each other. I'm danged if I know which is on top when Hashknife yells at me, but I didn't have no bets down anyway.

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WE THREW the keys into the corral and rode out of town, Hashknife's new hat flopping in the wind, and mine—that hard-boiled thing—skidding around from ear to ear.

"Where are we going now?" I asks as Badger City fades out of view.

"Where? I've got a idea, Sleepy."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Uh-huh. Going to bust up a cow outfit."

"Well, that's a nice thought, Hashknife. You sure do think of sweet things to do, cowboy. Puts two thousand in the bank in a town where we don't never dare to go, locks the court-house inside the jail and then opines to bust up a cow outfit."

"Yeah, she is a little romantic, ain't it?"

"Romantic? Good night and fare thee well! What's the idea, Hashknife?"

"Case of getting sore, Sleepy. Don't never let your angry passions rise. You likely won't, 'cause you ain't got no imagination, which ain't nothing against you. *Sabe?* I've got lots of imagination; therefore I gets mad easy.

"Yeah, I'm awful mad. I'm so danged mad that I turns phil—phil— What's a feller called what does things for folks without getting paid for it?"

"A —— fool."

"So classified, Sleepy, but knowed socially as a phil—phil—an—thro—fist."

"A rose by any other name don't lose its smell," says I.

"All right, cowboy. Now this here Crosby person has been getting the worst of it, ain't he? Ain't the Cross L been getting a dirty deal, too? The JHE loses cows, and one perfectly good puncher gets sent up for rustling.

"Now it's a cinch that one puncher never done it all, Sleepy. Them cows just sort of e-vaporates as it were. Funny conditions confront us, cowboy—very funny."

"Ha, ha, ha!" says I. "Very funny. We sold nothing for two thousand dollars and put the money where we don't dare go after it. Yeah, it's sure funny."

We jogs along in the gloom for a while and then Hashknife says:

"There's a light over there, Sleepy, and like as not it's Crosby's place. We want to see him."

"Lead on, McBluff, and I'll be danged if I'll be first to yelp, 'I've got a plenty.' That's Shakespeare."

"Where's he now, Sleepy?"

"Been dead for years and years."

"Aw, that's too —— bad. Still, we've all got to go when our time comes."

We rode into the yard of the ranch-house and dismounted. Somebody is playing the organ, but they quits as soon as Hashknife knocks on the door.

Hashknife starts to knock again just as the door opens and leaves him standing there with his fist upraised in Molly Crosby's face. She stares at us, and then the old man walks in behind her and looks over her shoulder.

"Come in, Spooner," says the old man. "Howdy, Ells."

"My gosh!" grunts Hashknife. "Take off your hat, Sleepy."

"Well," says Molly, "well, I—I——"

"Tha's all right," grins Hashknife. "We borrowed their hats and forgot to put our own on after we got through with 'em. Can we come in?"

"I—I beg your pardon," says Molly, "I forgot. Come right in."

Old man Crosby is a white-haired old gent with a resigned look on his face like he didn't have nothing to live for and was glad of it.

"Daddy," says Molly, pointing at Hashknife, "this is the gentleman who hit Ben Lober."

"That's nothing," grins Hashknife. "Sleepy busted Bennie's leg and danged near scalped Spooner."

The old man stares at us and then at Molly.

"Spooner?" he asks, looking back at Molly; but she didn't seem excited.

"Uh-huh," says I. "We locked the sheriff and Mister Spooner in their own jail, and then we wore their hats as sort of disguise."

"God be with you," says the old man pious-like. "I don't understand it at all, but I suppose it is all right. I want to thank you for protecting my little girl."

"Pshaw, she didn't need much," grins Hashknife. "She started the music and I sung him to sleep."

"Have you had any supper?" asks Molly.

"Not since dinner," grins Hashknife, "but don't you go to no trouble——"

Molly patted her old dad on the top of the head and went into the kitchen, smiling back at us. The old man rubs his hands and sort of relaxes.

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"What do you know about Spooner and Ells?" asks Hashknife.

"Well, I don't quite understand your question exactly," says the old man thoughtful-like. "Ells seems a capable officer, although he seems unable to stop cattle-stealing. Spooner has a very good record as prosecutor, I think."

"Convicted Shorty Blewett, didn't he?" asks Hashknife soft-like, and the old man nods.

"Yes, he convicted Shorty. I dunno. Seems to me that there's a lot of difference between law and justice in this world."

"Amen," says Hashknife. "This country ain't what she used to be."

"This country?"

The old man sets up straight and stares at Hashknife.

"This country is going to the dogs!"

"Yeah," nods Hashknife. "I've heard 'em barking. Have you ever considered getting outside help on this rustling proposition?"

"I have. I've sent letters to the Cattlemen's Association asking for help, but they don't even trouble about answering. I guess we'll have to work out our own salvation."

"Never answered, eh?" says Hashknife. "Why don't all you fellers combine and hire some good trailers?"

"We might do that, but I don't think it would help much. Our sheriff has been doing all he can, but it's a blind trail. There is absolutely no trail."

"Does Spooner or Ells know you wanted to get help on it—outside help?"

"No-o-o-o, I don't——"

"Daddy, you told Mister Spooner you were going to," says Molly from the doorway. "Don't you remember?"

"That's right, Molly, I did. I guess I was a little discouraged that day, and I told Spooner I was tired of a sheriff that rode circles all day and did no good. Yes, I remember telling him I was going to get a couple of detectives by the first of the month. I'd forgotten it."

HASHKNIFE looks at me and sort of nods.

"What did Spooner say?"

"Seemed pleased. Offered to help all he could. Spooner is——"

"That was sure nice of him," admits Hashknife. "Has anybody but the sheriff ever investigated the rustling game around here?"

Molly turns and walks back into the kitchen, and the old man seems to get very thoughtful. Then he says soft-like——

"Shorty said he had an idea how it was being done, but——"

"I know," nods Hashknife. "They're clever, but there's such a thing as being too danged clever. The JHE is the biggest outfit, ain't it?"

"Yes. It's the old Bar 80 outfit. Brill is said to be the owner, but we all know it is Eastern capital."

"Is it a bigger outfit now than it was as the old Bar 80?"

"Oh, yes. The Bar 80 was just a small outfit—smaller than mine or the Cross L."

"What kind of a feller is the Cross L owner?"

"Fine. Me and Jim Older came to this country together, and from the looks of things we'll go broke together. You'd like Jim. Now would you mind answering a few questions?"

"Shoot."

"You aiming to go into the cow business?"

"Nope. Don't ask us what the trouble was in Badger City, 'cause we ain't so sure yet. Me and Sleepy ain't so awful bad, and we'll come out in the wash.

"Pshaw, we ain't never introduced ourselves, have we? My name's Hartley, knowed as Hashknife. My pardner is Sleepy Stevens, called Sleepy 'cause he ain't."

The old man seems to enjoy the introduction, and then he says:

"Boys, I can't believe you're very bad. I can usually tell from a man's looks, and you don't look bad."

"Know what I am?" grins Hashknife. "Know what they calls a feller who does things for folks who never done nothing for him?"

"I know," nods Crosby. "I know what they usually calls him."

"Well, that's me," grins Hashknife. "In polite society they calls me a phil-an-thro-fist. *Sabe?* A phil-an-thro-fist is meek and mild until you angers 'em to a certain extent, and then—look out.

"I'm past that certain extent and going on up. I'm going to have re-venge, or I'll

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promise to go out in the hills and eat bunch-grass with the rest of the jassacks."

"I dunno," says the old man, shaking his head. "It's Greek to me, but I feel that my ignorance isn't going to hinder you none."

We sets there silent for a long time. The old man acts sort of thoughtful. I reckon me and Hashknife has used up about two cigarets when the old man says:

"Nope, I don't reckon I *sabe* your mission, young feller, but I ain't losing my appetite over it. I think Molly has supper ready."

She did, and I'd tell a man that Molly Crosby can cook rings around anything that ever hit a kitchen. She could fry a dish-rag and make it taste like a venison steak.

She ain't beautiful, Molly ain't, except when she smiles. She's kinda sad-looking, but when she smiles she'd make the Queen of Sheba look like an Aztec idol of mud.

We're almost through eating when somebody knocks on the door. Me and Hashknife slips our guns loose under the table, but the visitor was a stranger to us.

He's a man about as old as Crosby, thin as a whisper of wind, and he's got a big mop of white hair over a face that might belong to a poet. It sure wasn't a practical cow visage.

Then we meets Jack Older of the Cross L. I looks at the faces of them two and I can see where the rustlers have had a cinch. They're about as belligerent as a pair of snow-shoe rabbits. I ain't no plaster saint, but I'd as soon think of stealing from some widder women as them two.

"I thought the sheriff was here," says Older. "I saw his hat in the other room and wondered at it, because Slim told me about some trouble in town.

"It seems that two fellows held up Spooner and took two thousand away from him, and in the fracas Spooner was creased on the head and Ben Lober was shot in the leg. They caught one of the outlaws. Art McFee told Slim that it was the same two who shot Sam Peele. They're going to take the prisoner away from the sheriff tonight and hang him."

"My, my!" says Hashknife. "Ain't that awful? The poo-o-o-o-o-o-r kid!"

Molly burst out laughing, and Older looks foolish-like at us.

"I'm the one they're going to lynch," says I. "We plead guilty to shooting Sam Peele—leastwise we think we did—but we didn't steal no money. Badger City got the wrong hunch, and some of 'em paid for the mistake."

"I don't understand it, Jim," says Crosby. "She's some mixed. Ben Lober tried to grab hold of Molly today and Mister Hartley knocked him down."

"And hung him up by the heels," states Older. "Slim told me about it. You hit the sheriff, too, didn't you?"

"Uh-huh," admits Hashknife, rolling a smoke. "Seems like me and Sleepy got off to a flying start in Badger City."

"Slim didn't seem to know for sure," says Older, "but Ben Lober was jabbering something about detectives when they loaded him on to a wagon."

"We're phil-an-thro-fists—detectives with a reverse English," grins Hashknife.

"I dunno," says Older. "I sure don't. Glad to meetcha just the same. Slim and Al both said you looked like he-men."

"How many head of stock have you lost?" asks Hashknife.

"Well—" Older rubs his mop of white hair—"I don't know. I had about two thousand head in the Spring, but Slim says it won't total five hundred now."

"Geemighty! Has the JHE lost that many too?"

"I don't know how many. Of course they're a big outfit, and they don't confide in us small raisers very much."

"Not small raisers—big losers," corrects Hashknife. "Don't the sheriff ever get any hunch about who does the dirty work?"

"Does all he can, I reckon, but there is no clue. The stock just fades out."

"Aren't you afraid the sheriff will be after you?" asks Molly. "He might come out here and——"

"Not tonight, ma'am. They'll have to dynamite the jail, I reckon," and then he turns to Crosby.

"Get a sheet of paper and a pen."

Molly got the required articles and put them on the table.

"Address that envelope to the Cattlemen's Association at Helena. Fine. Now fold up that sheet of paper, put it inside and seal it.

"What time does the stage leave Badger City? Nine o'clock? All right, Mister Crosby; you take the letter down and post it about eight."

"But there's nothing inside it," protests Crosby, staring at Hashknife.

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"It's the things you can't read that will worry you the most. We'll put our broncs back of the barn and sleep in the hay-loft. Good night, folks."

Me and Hashknife argues up in that loft until he shoves some fox-tail grass in my mouth, and then we goes to sleep.

THE next morning we gets a big smile from Molly, along with ham and eggs, and then Hashknife putters around the little blacksmith shop, whistling some old honkatonk tune all the time. Then he takes me with him for a ride. He ropes a sample of every brand on the range and takes measurements.

"If you wanted to tell me what you're doing I'd listen," says I. "I'm plumb tired of asking questions and getting answered with a grin. For gosh sake, can't yuh do nothing but grin?"

"Phil-an-thro-fists has to grin, Sleepy. Dog-gone it, that's all they get out of life. You ought to grin more—honest yuh had, cowboy. You're getting wrinkles like the Grand Cañon. Get joyful and sing a little, can't yuh?"

"Now whatcha want to do—add all them figures and find out how much leather it takes to make a envelope for a cow?"

"Figures don't lie, Sleepy."

"But liars do a lot of figuring, Hashknife. When do we go back and hold up the bank for our money? I've got a hunch that this here country is getting too brittle to hold us. Think the sheriff and prosecutor are going to lay down under this kind of treatment?"

"Can't prognosticate a thing about mean folks like them, Sleepy. I'm sure beginning to feel sorry for them. Honest to gosh, my heart bleeds for them poor misguided officials, but like Fate I must go ahead.

"Ever read that poem which was written by a feller whose name sounds like an answer in Chinese? Something about the moving finger writes and having written moves on. I don't know the rest, Sleepy, but she means that it's all cut and dried, and it don't make no difference if your gun does stick. *Sabe?*"

"I don't," says I. "I'm for him in that moving-on stuff, but the rest of your discourse sounds like a gambler kissing a pocket-piece before he sits into a game. I think you're crazy if you asks me."

Hashknife don't get sore. He just grins at me sort of superior-like, which is worse than a cussing. Slim rides past that noon, and he seems astonished to see us setting on the top pole of the corral.

"Well, well!" says he, climbing up to us. "Never expected to see you two out in plain sight. Don't you know that the sheriff has a posse after you? What do you mean by holding up the stage and then setting out here in sight of all the world?"

"Did we rob a stage?" asks Hashknife.

"Verdict of the sheriff," grins Slim. "That's whatcha gets for busting him on the jaw. Held up the stage at Dancing Fork and swiped the U. S. mail. The driver says it was the same fellers who shot Sam Peele and held up Spooner."

"We're awful mean *hombres*, don'tcha think, Slim?" asks Hashknife.

"Sure are," grins Slim, rolling a smoke. "Ve-e-e-e-ry bad. Last night a bunch went down to the jail to lynch a murderer. They sure took the jail apart. Seems that Spooner and Ells put up a awful fight, but— Say, it's funny.

"They danged near choked Ells to death, and Spooner got a gun bent over his head, but the murderer got away. Ells swears that he got away in the fight, and now he's sore as —— at everybody concerned 'cause this same *hombre* helped to rob the stage.

"Lober was on the stage, too, and swears it was you. They tried to take him out in a wagon, but it rode too rough."

"Reckon they'll come out here?" I asks.

"Yeah. I heard some of 'em speak about it. Sheriff told 'em that Crosby was a old friend of one of you; so I came out ahead. Crosby is a friend of mine, and Molly is one hy-iu little lady, y'betcha."

"Spooner's kinda shining around Molly, ain't he?" asks Hashknife.

"Trying to," admits Slim, and just then Al Stingle rides in.

"Better get down," says he. "Visitors coming."

We climbs down and the four of us walks down to the house. Molly and her dad meets us at the door, and I can see that they know what's coming.

"Let me talk to them, boys," says the old man. "I know what they want, but I also know you never held up the stage."

"Did they believe you when you said that Shorty wasn't a rustler?" asks Hashknife soft-like. "Did they?"

Molly's face gets a shade whiter and she steps back against the door when Hashknife

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asks that. The old man glances at her and shakes his head.

"Wh-what do you know about Shorty?" she whispers. "What——"

"Very little—but enough," says Hashknife. "Maybe I know more than that. Now you folks just stand here and let 'em ride up. They'll naturally be ready for trouble and sort of hard to handle, but pretty soon they relaxes and it's hard to get up speed again. Me and Sleepy will be just around the corner until such relaxation takes place."

He shoves me around the corner and we stands there flat against the wall. Believe me, I gets as thin as a cigaret-paper.

In about a minute we hears the bunch ride into the yard. Crosby calls Ells by name, and I hears Brill say something to Slim and get a short answer.

"Is the Lazy U in the habit of harboring outlaws?" asks Crosby.

"No," says Ells, "but they said something about going to work for you."

Al Stingle laughs and then says—

"Since when did stage-robbers tell the sheriff where they were going to look for work?"

Several men seem to laugh out loud, and the tension is gone.

"Well, he—" begins Ells, and just then Hashknife steps out with me right at his side.

Neither of us has a gun in our hands. Hashknife seems to be fumbling in his vest pocket for something.

That posse just sets there with their mouths open. Reminds me of a horse caught flat-footed when the barrier went up.

"You—" begins Ells, staring at us, and then he stops.

"They wouldn't be looking for jobs," says Hashknife slow-like. "Outlaws never look for jobs, but they might hold office."

"Whatcha mean?" snaps Ells. "I arrest you——"

"When?" interrupts Hashknife, grinning. "Easy—everybody. This ain't no killing matter—yet. I know what the stage-driver said and I know what Lober said and I know who told 'em to say it."

"Who?" asks one of the posse.

"Just a minute!" snaps Ells. "I want to get this straight. Appears to me that somebody is mistaken—maybe. Crosby, do you know where these boys were this morning?"

"What time?" asks Molly.

"About nine-thirty."

"Right here. Mister Hartley was working in the blacksmith shop and Mister Stevens was sitting on that bench cleaning his gun. I think Mister Hartley was working on a branding-iron."

"Branding-iron?" asks the sheriff.

"Slickest thing you ever seen," nods Hashknife. "Going to make a lot of alleged cowmen set up and take notice."

"Well, ——!" swears Brill, easing himself in the saddle. "All this fuss for nothing, eh?"

Ells says something under his breath and swings his horse around.

"Sorry to have troubled you," says he, and we stands there and watches that posse ride away down the road.

"MY ——!" grunts Slim, staring at Hashknife. "Did you hypnotize 'em? Think of Bill Ells standing for anything like that! Escaped prisoner and all that, and he just says, 'Sorry to have troubled you.' "

"Miss Crosby's alibi changed their minds," grins Hashknife.

"Like —— it did!" snorts Al. "Looks to me like they was wishful to grab any old chance to drift home, like the feller who caught the bob-cat and didn't know how to let loose."

"I don't *sabe* it at all," complains Crosby. "It ain't reasonable."

"It sure ain't," I agrees. "I almost had heart-failure when Miss Crosby mentioned me cleaning my gun. I just realized that I plumb forgot to put the shells back in, and I could see 'em shining on the bench where I left 'em."

"Sleepy, Sleepy, you'll be the death of us both some day," says Hashknife. "Always forgetting. You'd 'a' looked fine standing there snapping an empty gun, wouldn't you?"

"Aw, we had 'em buffaloed anyway. They was plumb leary of that derringer."

"That's sure plumb nice," grins Hashknife. "Yes, sir, that's elegant. Notice me fumbling in my vest pocket? I forgot I put it in my pants pocket when I was blacksmithing. I reckon there's a Providence that looks after or over idiots and phil-an-thro-fists."

"Aw, ——!" grunts Al, waving his arms. "It's all loco. What would anybody rob

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that mail for anyway? Nothing but reading-matter."

"And not much of that," grins Hashknife.

"Well, I'm going home," states Slim. "I hankered for excitement and all I got was a beg-your-pardon. My ——, I never saw so much politeness in my whole life. Come on, Al."

We watches 'em ride away and then sets down on the porch with Molly and her dad.

"Ells never even asked for his hat," says Molly.

"Ma'am, that *hombre* has got so much in his mind right now that he don't feel the need of a cover for it," grins Hashknife, and just then Older rides in.

"Was that a posse that just left here?" he asks.

"No," says Hashknife; "that was a social organization. Glad you came over, 'cause I reckon the time is ripe to do something. Why don't you combine with the Lazy U? Make one good outfit."

"Combine? What do you mean?"

"To squeeze out the rustlers. You fellers has got to do something to bust up their party, ain't you?"

Crosby and Older looks at each other and then at Hashknife.

"Just how and why?" asks Older. "Why are you interested, and how would a combination of our outfits stop the rustling?"

"I ain't interested—I'm mad; and I'll put myself out to bring sorrow to their wickiup. Here is the first move: Write a letter to the Cattlemen's Association asking that the Lazy U and Cross L brands be canceled and that the O Cross B be registered to cover both former brands. Older and Crosby. *Sabe?* Brand on left hip, same as the old ones."

The two old pelicans takes it under advisement silently, and after a while Molly steps in and says——

"I'd take a chance, dad."

"Wish I knew more about it," says Older. "I hate to——"

"Columbus wished the same thing," grins Hashknife, "but he went ahead and they built a monument for him. He took a chance."

"All right," says Older. "We haven't much to lose. Crosby, you write the letter and I'll post it."

"In Divide," says Hashknife.

"Why not in Badger?" asks Older.

"Too many hold-ups. This letter goes through."

"I think I begin to see," says Crosby slow-like. "That blank——"

"You've got it," grins Hashknife. "Go ahead and write."

We sets down on the porch and smokes a while. Molly is fussing with some of that fancy-work stuff, and pretty soon she says sort of soft-like:

"You spoke about Shorty Blewett a while ago. Do you believe him guilty?"

"Nope," says Hashknife. "Almost a cinch. What kind of a *hombre* was he?"

"Well—" Molly sort of bows her head over her work—"well, we were to be married this month."

"Excuse me all to ——," says Hashknife sober-like, and then he stares off across the hills for a while. "You—you ain't turned against him none, have you, ma'am?"

She shakes her head and smiles at something away off in the direction of Deer Lodge, and then goes into the house.

"See that smile, Sleepy?" whispers Hashknife. "Cowboy, she's all woman. Somewhere up that horse-thief's e-eventuality is a poor devil in a suit, numbered like a box-car, and that smile was for him. He'll get it too, cowboy. Cement and steel and distance can't stop a smile like that. Likely she prays for him, too.

"I wish somebody'd love me like that. She just sets here, waiting and waiting and smiling thataway, and up there in the pen is a feller, who is just a number, and—Whatcha been doing, Sleepy—peeling onions?"

"Go to ——!" says I. "I've got a cold."

"Yeah, so have I. Reckon I'll have to get Shorty turned loose."

"Sure. All you've got to do is to walk up, knock on the door and say, 'Let Shorty Blewett out, please," and out he comes."

"Maybe you ain't so danged far off at that, Sleepy. Reckon I'll go and finish up that iron. Want to see a regular blacksmith working?"

I sets in the doorway while he builds a fire, and then has to listen to him sing his everlasting song about poor Toothpick. It goes like this:

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"Oh, Toothpick Thompson was a son-of-a-gun,
Git along, my little dogie, git along.
He'll meet the undertaker 'fore I git done,
Git along, my little dogie, git along.
Though the trail is rough and the cactus sharp,
An' the cold wind blows through my ragged tarp,
He's due to shovel coal or twang a harp,
Git along, my little dogie, git along."

It don't sound just like that though. You've got to frame your own tune and sort of sing it through your nose mournful-like, sort of hanging on to the words "along" until you're out of breath. She's some effective.

He drones out the last line and then slaps the iron into the slack-tub.

"I'm some brainy cuss, Sleepy," says he. "You ought to brag about me a little."

"Yeah? You sure ain't asthmatic in your own behalf, Hashknife. You sure can talk above a whisper, but you has too many secrets. You won't tell me a danged thing, will you? No, of course not.

"I follers you just like a sheep. When you say, 'Shoot,' I shoot. I'm weaned and rope-broke, Hashknife, and able to take nourishment without getting the colic, and still you won't tell me anything."

He holds up the cooled iron and admires it a heap.

"Latest style on the Wind River range, cowboy. Artistic, eh?"

"Got the letter written, and Older has left for Divide," says Crosby from the doorway.

"Good. Me and Sleepy are going over to the JHE, and likely from there to Badger City. We may be late getting back."

I follers him—as usual. Molly waves at us from the house, and I feels that she's wishing us good luck. We need all we can get, I reckon.

"Now," says I, "I want to know something, Hashknife. Why are we going to the JHE, and do we go in sorrow or in anger? We've got all our guns, and what I want to know is this: Do we use 'em?"

"She all depends. Did you ever see a feller packing a extra wheel on his automobile? Well, he ain't figuring on trouble, but he's ready in case something busts. *Sabe?*"

"Thanks," says I. "You sure do give things away. Sometime you'll bust out and tell me why you hunts for Toothpick."

"Why, Sleepy, ain't I never told you?"

"Not yet."

"Well, well! You've got a surprize coming, cowboy."

"Yeah—coming."

MISTER BRILL wasn't looking for us. He was cinching a saddle on a rangy roan when we rode up, and had his back toward us. He acts cautious, letting go of that latigo, and then turns slow-like.

"What do you want?" he asks.

"Mostly everything," says Hashknife.

"Meaning," says Brill, sort of easing one hand toward his middle.

I sees Brill's hand stop and then start coming up, and then I glances at Hashknife, whose right hand is resting on his thigh, and the gun in that hand is covering Brill's anatomy.

"Ease your gun loose and drop it over the fence," orders Hashknife.

Brill don't hesitate.

"How long have you owned the JHE outfit?"

"None of your——"

"Aw, be polite," grins Hashknife. "Take that saddle off, 'cause you ain't going no place, and then lead us up to the house, where we can be comfortable. Geemighty, but you're shy on hospitality."

Brill acts like he was sore at somebody, but he does as he's ordered.

We all sets down and then Hashknife says——

"Brill, you knowed Shorty Blewett?"

"Knowed him—yes."

"What was he sent up for?"

"Venting a JHE and running a Cross L."

"Who caught him at it?"

"Me and Ben Lober."

"Good. Lober's in the hospital, but he'll be willing to talk. Now——"

"What's the idea?" snarls Brill. "What right you got——"

"Relax," advises Hashknife. "You're under a strain. Trying to make us think you're mad at us, eh?

"Brill, I'm the best friend you've got. I'm going to do something for you."

"What's that?"

"Let you make your getaway. Set still! You've got the penitentiary staring you right in the eyes, and you dang well know it. How much of the JHE stock do you own?"

He stares at us and wets his lips. He sure is a weak sister.

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"Why—what—" he begins mumbling, but Hashknife slides a sheet of paper and a pencil in front of him, and he stares at the writing stuff.

"Move up close to the table, Brill. That's fine. Now I want you to take hold of that pencil. *Sabe?* Fine.

"Now start in the upper left-hand corner of that sheet of paper. Ready? Good.

"Now, write us the true story of how Shorty was framed. Tell us all about it, Brill. Use all the names and dates, and don't get worried, 'cause nobody's going to hurt you—unless you get cramps in your fingers."

"I'll be —— if I do!" he howls. "You ain't——"

"Penmanship or penitentiary!" snaps Hashknife.

"You're bluffing! If you think for a second that you can bluff——"

Hashknife takes the pencil out of Brill's fingers and makes a few little figures at the top of the sheet. Brill stares at 'em and then at Hashknife.

"Think I'm bluffing?" grins Hashknife, and Brill licks his lips.

He stares at the wall for a moment and then starts writing. It took him about half an hour to finish, and then he flips the pencil on the table.

"That's all I know," says he weary-like, "so help me God!"

Hashknife folds up the paper and puts it in his pocket.

"How much do we owe you for your share of the ranch, Brill?"

He tears up several cigaret-papers trying to roll a smoke, and the first puff sort of strangles him.

"I—I— You don't owe me nothing. I own my own horse and rig—that's all."

"Give you two hundred and fifty," says Hashknife, hauling out the check-book. "Shall I make it out to Brill or Jack McKee?"

Brill dropped his cigaret and stared at Hashknife.

"Knowed you all along," grins Hashknife. "You was the key of the whole thing, McKee. Funny; eh? Key and McKee.

"Figured out a brand myself. Cross L and Lazy U are going to combine and call it the O Cross B. How's that?"

He revolves it in his mind for a moment and then grins.

"Well—fine. Me and you ought to have— Huh.

"Well, I'm much obliged to yuh, old-timer. That check looks better with Brill on it. Thanks. Reckon I'll drift."

We watched him saddle up and climb his bronc. Then he turns back.

"Wasn't you trailing a *hombre* named Toothpick Thompson? Thought I remembered it. Wish you all kinds of luck. *Adios.*"

"Was he a friend of yours, Hashknife—this Brill?"

"No-o-o-o, I don't reckon so. He didn't know me though. I knowed him by reputation as the slickest hair-brander in the Southwest, and they tell me he is some wise *hombre* on brand combinations.

"One night me and three of the boys from the Hashknife outfit caught him hair-branding a filly by the light of a camp-fire. The filly was loco, so we tied him on her back and headed him into the Mohave Desert dressed in a undershirt."

"He knowed Toothpick Thompson?"

"Maybe—I don't know. Lot of the boys knowed I was trailing Toothpick."

We got our broncs and Hashknife headed straight for the Lazy U instead of to Badger, and I follered—as usual. We walked right into the house and there is Abe Spooner, big as life, talking to Molly and the old gent. Spooner is a bit flustrated, but Hashknife shakes his hand like he was his pal.

"This sure is luck," laughs Hashknife. "Sure saves us trouble. Tell you what I want you to do, Spooner; I want you to put into motion the machinery which will release Shorty Blewett from the pen."

"You . . . do?" says Spooner with his mouth wide open like a gasping fish.

"Uh-huh. You see, Spooner, he wasn't guilty. No, sir, he wasn't guilty at all. Ain't that funny? Don't your heart bleed for a innocent man thataway?"

"I—I—I don't know——"

"Indigestion?" asks Hashknife. "You ought to chaw your food more. Set down and rest a little. Brill passed out this afternoon, and he left a little confession."

"Brill . . . passed . . . out?" gasps Spooner. "He—he——"

"Uh-huh. Owned the JHE, didn't he, Spooner?"

"Ye—yes—that is, I think so."

"I bought him out," says Hashknife.

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"Spooner, have you any idea of how much JHE stock is on this range?"

"Why—why—no."

"Well, I reckon I got a bargain, anyway. How soon can you get Shorty out of the pen?"

Spooner wets his lips and starts to get up.

"I don't know. I—I'll have to see the sheriff—and——"

"Well, we'll go with you. Brill mentioned him, too. Said something about Lober being——"

"That's a lie!" snaps Spooner. "Brill lied——"

"About what?" asks Hashknife.

"That—that— I've got to go."

Spooner grabs his hat and starts for the door, and we're right on his heels. I caught Molly's eye as we went out, and she looks like a person who wants to be joyful but is plumb afraid.

Spooner acts plumb tongue-tied and his eyes are wild, but I reckon he'd forgot he owned a gun—if he had one at all. Me and Hashknife rides one on each side of him, and we fogs off down that road like we was going to a dance.

Gray Wolf and Diablo sure can run, but they has to lay down and go some to keep up with Spooner's little brown mare. We skids around a hair-pin curve, going like a bat out of ——, and all to once we tangles with another rider and his pack-animal.

Me and Gray Wolf and that pack-horse all went off the grade in a tangle. Gray Wolf was a born acrobat, and somehow he manages to hit on his feet at the bottom. I got skinned up a little, but I slides my rifle loose and climbs back up to the road.

Spooner is leaning against a tree, trying to pump wind back into his lungs and work the lever of Hashknife's Winchester, neither of which seems to work properly. In the middle of the road stands the sheriff, gore running down his homely face, and acts a heap like he was trying to line his sights on Hashknife, who is down behind the sheriff's horse, sort of tangled up.

"Look out, Bill!" screams Spooner when I climb over into the road.

Ells whirls toward me and I felt the wind of his bullet whisper past my ear. He didn't feel the wind of mine. He just seems to sort of teeter forward on his toes, and then buckled backward to the dirt.

I hears another shot and glances sideways in time to see Spooner slump down on his hands and knees and slide flat on his face.

HASHKNIFE drags himself out from under the dead bronc and rubs his chin.

"There goes their old court-house ring, Sleepy," says he, grinning. "We met the enemy and they are ours."

I turned Spooner over and hauled him into the shade, and then we did the same for Ells. Spooner blinks up at us and sort of remembers things. Tears appear in his little eyes, and he tries to beg.

"Shut up!" snaps Hashknife. "Save your wind, feller."

"I don't want to die!" wails Spooner. "Don't let me die!"

"He can't last long," says Hashknife. "But I don't care much."

"Don't say that," begs Spooner. "I'll do anything—anything—hear me?"

Funny what a bullet will do to a man, ain't it?

"If you lie to me I'll let you die like a coyote," says Hashknife, and Spooner blinks hard.

"You hired two men to kill us as we rode in, didn't you?"

Spooner groans and twists, but nods his head. Hashknife tears a check out of his book, turns it face down on the book and digs out his pencil. Then he props Spooner against a rock and hands him the stuff.

"Write out a bill of sale to Crosby & Older for the JHE outfit. Mark it 'Paid in Full.' *Sabe?*"

Spooner stares at Hashknife, and he seems to get convulsions.

"Go ahead," advises Hashknife. "The sooner you do it the sooner you'll get to a doctor."

"Bill of sale?" he whispers. "Who are you to— What do I get?"

"You get help or—a harp. Decide quick."

Spooner wet that bill of sale with bitter tears, but his life's blood was worth a lot to him, and he signed it all proper-like.

"Did Ells have any interest in this?" asks Hashknife.

"Let him answer," says I. "He's woke up."

We has to shake him quite a lot before he gets his *sabe* back, and Hashknife wipes the blood out of his eyes before he can see. He reads the bill of sale sort of dazed-like

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and then squints at us. Hashknife hands him the pencil.

"Right below Spooner's signature, Ells," grins Hashknife, and Ells scrawls it like a man in his sleep.

Then he stares at poor Spooner.

"Much obliged," says Hashknife. "The sheriff's bronc is dead, I reckon, but Spooner's will carry double. I'd advise the border—fast."

"What are you talking about?" wails Spooner. "I need a doctor!"

"Like —— you do," whoops Hashknife. "You need a jeweler."

He reaches down and picks out Spooner's watch-chain. In the middle on the string of gold-pieces is one with a big lead slug partly wrapped in a twenty.

"That .44 slug busted into your stummick and upset your nervous system," whoops Hashknife, "Ells' head was so danged hard that Sleepy's bullet just skidded. You fellers ain't hurt—you're simply shocked."

Ells and Spooner stares at each other and then weaves to their feet. We threw their guns over the grade, and Hashknife watched 'em until I got Gray Wolf and their pack-animal back to the road. Then they both got on Spooner's mare and started away.

I reckon I know how they felt, giving up everything thataway.

"Thy sins have found thee out," grins Hashknife. "I hope mine never find me in."

"Now," says I, "you Egyptian Spinks, speak up and tell your little bunkie the secret. How did you know they rustled them cows?"

Hashknife rolls a smoke and leans back.

"McKee. As soon as I seen that pelican I says to myself, 'Brands is the answer.' I got to wondering why they changed the old Bar So to JHE."

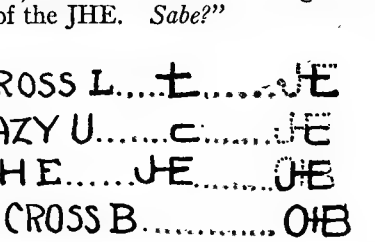
Hashknife takes a stick and makes a Cross L in the dust. Then he makes a Lazy U.

"See them two brands, Sleepy? Now watch."

He makes an E out of the L, and draws a J ahead of it. Then he grins at me.

"See how they made a JHE out of Cross L without any trouble? Now, all you have to do is to finish up that Lazy U into an E, and add the J Bar to make it JHE. *Sabe?*

"Now if these pelicans had made any yelps about making good I was going to rebrand everything on the range with the O Cross B, the same of which fits right over the top of the JHE. *Sabe?*"



"Hashknife," says I, "don't teach me any more. That's penitentiary bait."

"Uh-huh. I suppose I ought to 'a' sent Spooner and Ells to the pen, but what's the use of doing that? I wouldn't pen up a coyote."

Just then a wagon comes rattling around the curve, and in it is Older, Crosby and Molly. They stares at the dead bronc and then at us. Hashknife grins and hands them the bill of sale, and they sure gets interested.

"Wh-what does it mean?" stutters Crosby. "Everything on the JHE?"

"Uh-huh. That ain't all either. I've got a confession that will bring Shorty Blewett out of the pen—whiter than snow."

Molly sort of sways in her seat and stares at him.

"Absolutely, ma'am," grins Hashknife. "Soon as I can find a judge."

"Oh!" says she, and that's all.

I reckon there are times when a person's tongue gets handcuffed.

"Let's go, folks," says Hashknife. "We've got to see the judge."

We looked back after we got started, and sees Molly setting there in the bumpy old wagon with her hands folded in her lap, but she wasn't feeling the jolts of that old dead-ex wagon.

Old Judge Stevens was plumb receptive. The whole gang of us enters his office, and after he reads that confession he goes straight up.

"Get him out?" he howls. "Will I? Of all the rotten deals——"

"Come on, Sleepy," says Hashknife, taking me by the sleeve. "Let's get out before the old coot dies from apoplexy."

Crosby grabbed us at the door and he's trembly all over.

"Where you going?" he asks. "Me and Older want you to take third interest in the new outfit. No, no, you can't refuse! Why, man alive, we've——"

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"Just a minute," grins Hashknife. "Me and Sleepy has got to see a man."

We manages to get away before he kissed us, and then we met the man. He asked us what we'd have, and we told him. We bathed our souls in it, and we grew light-hearted and gay.

"Sleepy," says Hashknife, "we've got seventeen hundred dollars and a third interest in a cow outfit. Do we settle down to a ripe old age?"

"And give up our hunt for Toothpick Thompson, Hashknife?"

We looks at each other and both shakes our heads at the same time.

"Tell you what we'll do: We'll give Molly and her feeance seven hundred and fifty to start housekeeping on, eh? Fine! A thousand is plenty for us."

We talked to the man again, and later on we finds Molly and her dad and Older. Hashknife makes an elaborate bow, forgets the speech we framed up, but gives Molly the check. He orates in favor of giving Molly and her man the third interest and keeping the cow outfit in the family.

I starts in where Hashknife left off and talked so danged fast that they can't refuse. Molly kissed both of us, and I think I kissed Older and Crosby. Hashknife says I did, but I don't remember kissing Older.

Next thing I remember is meeting the restaurant person with the long lock of hair and ancient cigaret.

"The sheriff sloped," says he. "Hope he never comes back."

"Whyfore he sloped?" I asks.

"Shot a feller who didn't have no gun. I hope they catch him and hang the son-of-a-rooster. Know what he done—him and Spooner? They arrested Shorty Blewett just when he was going to pay me the seventeen dollars he owed me."

"Who did he shoot?" asks Hashknife.

"Brill. Betcha the JHE outfit will make him hard to catch."

"Kill him?"

"Not dead. They sent him to Divide on a buckboard. Brill took a few drinks and met the sheriff. Nobody knows why Ells shot him, but Brill was unarmed and—that's bad business. The sheriff packed a horse and lit out."

Hashknife writes him out a check for seventeen, and we both shakes hands with the feller. Then we went on. In the saloon where we had our first run-in with Ells the bartender sets 'em up to us and acts real friendly.

"Got a note for you," says he, handing Hashknife a slip of paper. "Brill wrote it after he was shot. Said to slip it to the tall one."

Hashknife leans against the bar and reads it over several times. Then he digs down inside his shirt and pulls out a little buckskin sack, which he turns around and around in his fingers. Pretty soon he says:

"Sleepy, will you take this and give it to Molly? Tell her it's a Christmas present to her and Shorty from Hashknife Hartley. Tha's all, cowboy."

Molly didn't know what to say, and I went away before she said it. I had to hunt all over town to find Hashknife, and then I meets him coming out of the bank. We gets on our broncs and as usual I follers Hashknife out of town.

We rides along quite a while in silence and then Hashknife starts singing, "If I ne-e-e-e-ver had 'a' met you, I ne-e-e-e-ver would 'a' loved you, git along my little dogie, git along my little dearie——"

"Did you get that thousand dollars, Hashknife?" I asks.

"Minus seventeen dollars," says he. "No, but it's safe, Sleepy."

"Where?"

"In a church."

"Go ahead and talk."

"I was in the bank to get it, Sleepy. Little old coot comes jigging in, and lays down a dollar and eighty cents. Funny little coot, Sleepy, with eyes like a tired dog. Says to the cashier——

" 'Here is a little more—very little; but each cent brings us nearer to a church in Badger City.'

"You building a church?" I asks, and he smiles—not grins, Sleepy—and says——

" 'We are not building yet, brother, but we have hopes.'

"I hands him the check and says to him——

" 'If every dollar brings a hope, pardner, have nine hundred and eighty-three hopes on us.' "

We drifts along for a while, and then Hashknife turns to me.

"Sleepy, you ain't sore, are you?"

"Yeah, I am; sore that we gave two hundred and fifty to Brill when the church business is so hopeless. I ain't asking much, Hashknife, but I'd admire to know

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what that present was which I gave Molly?"

"A bullet, Sleepy—just a old lead bullet."

"Merry Christmas," says I. "You're a regular Santa Claus."

"Once upon a time," says Hashknife, "there was two jiggers, who—well, one of them says public-like——

" 'I'm going to shoot Hashknife Hartley.'

"Hashknife rises up on his hind legs and orates—

" 'If you do I'll dig out the bullet and make you eat it if I have to foller you the rest of my life.'

"That was the bullet, Sleepy. I didn't make good."

We rides along for a while, and then Hashknife turns in his saddle and hands me back the note which the bartender had given him. It read:

DER SIR—Shorty Blewett is a nice feller, but maybe you like to know he is Toothpik Tomson just the same but diferent name. Yours truly, BRILL.

I stares at Hashknife's homely, sober face, and all to once he breaks into a big grin.

"Aw, I ain't mad at nobody, Sleepy. She's a great old world."

"Uh-huh, and few of us ever get out of it alive, Hashknife."

"Yeah, that's a fact, cowboy, but she helps a lot if we can help here and grin when we leave for the hereafter—ho, hum-m-m-m-m. Git along my little dogie, git along my little dogie; we're going to Montana on the old Lo-Lo trail."

And that was whatever.

The CALL of the CRIMSON STAR

by

Samuel Alexander White

Author of "Sunless Seas," "Blended Brigades," etc.

ANTHONY HENDRY, bookkeeper for the Hudson's Bay Company at York Factory, stood at the water's edge below the post and watched the run of the Spring floods gyrating past. Before him the Hayes River flowed full to the brim, pouring into James Bay just beyond and bearing down on its tawny breast the fleets of Indian canoes from the interior.

From a land of mystery they came, from the headwaters of the Hayes, from the shores of stormy Winnipeg, from the mighty sinuous Saskatchewan River which fed the lake itself, and mysterious as the country they came from were these far-faring canoemen who made the annual fur trip to the bay. Silent, stoic, cryptic, when they came they talked little about their distant hunting-grounds and then only to their familiars, to men like Hendry who interested himself in their characters, their language, their customs.

From the first they had fired Hendry's imagination, till now he longed for Governor Isham's permission to penetrate their haunts, to draw away the veil of mystery from the interior, to plunge boldly up the Hayes, cross the Winnipeg and be the first bay man to set foot on the Western plains.

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But Isham had never given permission.

Hendry had entered Isham's service at York Factory in 1750 and had already served four years, during which time Isham had always had work on the post accounts for Anthony's pen to do. The opportunity to gratify his desires had never been presented, so Hendry year by year had quelled those desires and soothed his restless spirit in talking with the hunters and hearing the strange tales which they bore down with their furs.

As ever, they came this year, in the bewitched warmth of the night of the twenty-fifth of June, like phantoms, driving their yellow birch-bark canoes through the lisping shore eddies, beaching their craft on the bank and packing their bales into the post, walking in single file, tall, bronze nomads under the rising moon. Then they emerged again, their long journey accomplished, to pitch their teepees by the Hayes and rest their limbs for the return paddle to the interior. While the poles went up and the skins were strung and the smoke of many cooking-fires made dun-colored spirals against the glittering sky, Hendry seized the opportunity to stroll over and converse with them, singling out an old acquaintance, Attickashish (Little Deer), a tried friend of his and often interpreter at the post, as spokesman for the tribe.

"Well, Attickashish," he greeted, "your tribe is here once more this year."

"Even as swift as the wild geese they are here," returned Attickashish, nodding at the black wedges which drove overhead in the moonlight and circled down to their nesting-grounds on James Bay.

"And how runs the fur this season?" asked Hendry, lighting his pipe with a twig from the fire.

"The fur is good and the catch is big, but the evil of it is that much of the catch does not travel as far as York Factory," spoke Attickashish oratorically.

Hendry stared into the black surface-lighted eyes.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded. "Are there other traders in our district poaching on us?"

"It is the French," explained Attickashish. "They have built a post on the Saskatchewan River and much fur that of old journeyed eastward in canoes to James Bay now goes westward to their trading-house on the plains."

"By Heavens, is that so?" cried Hendry in surprize. "Have you told Governor Isham about it?"

"I have told him all that our hunting-brothers, the Salteaux, told us. We have not seen these things with our own eyes, but it may be we shall see. The governor holds a council. Look! There is his bowsmen now to summon you."

Hendry turned to find Gray Wolf, the bowsman of the crew of the governor's canoe, standing at his elbow. Gray Wolf was garbed in color as befitted his rank, with his bright leggings, his flaming sash and his vivid fillet full of dyed plumes. As he delivered his message he held himself superbly erect with the dignity of a personal servant of the governor.

"The governor asks you to come to his council room," he announced briefly.

"It is good, Gray Wolf," acquiesced Hendry with a nod of recognition. "I follow you."

Stalking ahead, Gray Wolf led the way across the yard in front of Governor Isham's house and ascended the steps of the broad veranda. There he stood aside as Hendry entered the room, then again took up his place as door-guardian and right-hand attendant on his master.

THE door was open to the balmy June night, the atmosphere of the room one with the atmosphere outside, laden with the fragrance of the forest-flowers, the magic dankness of flood-waters, the tang of the awakening wild; and through it all drifted the savor of the company's tobacco. Under the mellow candlelight the smoke eddied thickly about the long table in the center of the room, a table covered with documents and maps, and, ranged about the board, Anthony glimpsed through the blue haze the post-officials, chief traders, clerks, guides and interpreters assembled for the session.

Governor Isham presided at the head, his subordinates seated in two long lines on either hand. On the governor's immediate right waited an empty chair and at Hendry's entrance Isham greeted him with a pleasant smile and beckoned him to the reserved place. Anthony had always been a favorite with Isham and to him the governor accorded more privileges than he did to most of the other company servants.

"Anthony, it is the matter of the beaver

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shrinkage I am going to speak about," he confided affably. "Did you happen to hear the Indians talking about it?"

"Attickashish had just mentioned it to me as I talked with him down at the teepees," Hendry told him. "He had given me no more than the bare announcement of the presence of the French on the Saskatchewan when your bowsman came to me. I am all eagerness to hear the full word."

"I believe that," bantered Isham. "The Saskatchewan country has always been your hobby, hasn't it, Anthony? Well, it is as I thought. Last season our beaver returns shrank all at once, shrank seriously and inexplicably. Here on the bay so far from the source of my supply I could not rightly know the reason. All I could do was to surmise, but at the same time I had my suspicions. I suspected the French from Montreal.

"It seemed just possible that some of those traders who followed La Verendrye and his sons into the West had pushed far enough to tap our supplies at their source. Now comes the seemingly definite word from the Salteaux of the interior, word carried by our own trusted hunters, that the French have built a post just below where two great branches of the Saskatchewan join.

"Further, this tallies with the secret report sent in to me by the factor at Moose River. Last Fall his men went up the Moose and Missinaibie Rivers and down the Michipicoten to Lake Superior on matters of the company. This Winter they returned by dog-train and brought, among other valuable information, the news that a French trader from Montreal, de la Corne by name, had taken a party into the Saskatchewan by Lake Superior and the Kaministiquia River."

Governor Isham paused and a murmur of comprehension ran round his council-table.

"If the French post is built," the governor continued when all was quiet again, "and I have no doubt now that it must be built, de la Corne and his party built it."

"Who made up de la Corne's party?" Hendry ventured to ask. "Did the Moose River men learn its size and composition?"

"Yes," informed Governor Isham; "they learned it was a party large enough to accomplish the building of a post. De la Corne himself, who, you must know, is officially a French captain of marine, was in charge. His second in command was Lieutenant Tremblay, his officer in charge of canoes——"

Again Isham paused, his eyes staring curiously at Hendry, who had started so violently that he had half-risen from his chair.

"What's the matter with you, Anthony?" he demanded.

Hendry recovered himself abruptly and settled down in his seat, but although he was outwardly composed again his eyes burned into Isham's.

"I beg your pardon—" he spoke evenly enough—"but de la Corne's second in command you mentioned, Lieutenant Tremblay; could it be Lieutenant Tremblay from France?"

"Yes, late of Cherbourg, now of Montreal, the report said," nodded Isham. "Like many another French adventurer, he was drifted across the seas to seek his fortune in the fur trade. You knew Tremblay over there?"

"Yes, he was a smuggling friend of mine," confessed Hendry with a short laugh. "You see Cherbourg is not far across the English Channel from my old home in the Isle of Wight. But the officer in charge of de la Corne's canoes?"

"Charles Clairvaux, according to the report."

This time Hendry did not start but a slight quiver ran over his frame.

"Another friend from France?" questioned Governor Isham.

"An enemy this time, but from Cherbourg too. Was any one else traveling with you?"

"Only Tremblay's daughter—Mlle. Agnes I think the report named her. Perhaps another friend, Anthony?"

Isham laughed slyly, at the same time keenly reading Hendry's face, and Anthony felt his cheeks flush under the governor's scrutiny.

"Aye, another friend if you must know," Hendry murmured. "Somehow one's friends and enemies are always mingling."

"True, I grant you that," smiled the governor. "But I see it is a private affair and I will concern myself with trade relations only. So, to get back to de la Corne, those were the only ones of his party deemed of such importance as to be named in my report. The rest were his French retainers, his underlings, his voyageurs.

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"That is the situation. These people went in last year. Last year the post on the Saskatchewan sprang up. It is plain that the French from Montreal have stolen a march on us. We have been asleep on James Bay, letting them steal our trade, but we must sleep no longer. Tomorrow I am going to send a man in from the bay to the Saskatchewan country. Tonight I have summoned this meeting to call for a volunteer."

The governor's decision came suddenly, unexpectedly to the assembly round the table, as most decisions and commands of the Hudson's Bay Company were wont to come, and for a moment the men sat silent while Isham's glance traveled up and down the board.

It was a motley group he gazed on—south-of-England men from many shires, Londoners off the Strand, black sheep of the gentry, Lowlanders, Highlanders, Orkneymen, men of the Hebrides. They had just passed through the bitter Hudson Bay Winter and were homesick for the lands beyond the pass. The pleasant sedentary Summer life of the post had come as a respite to their depressed spirits. They were reluctant to give it up for the harder life of the trails and they hesitated, each looking at the others as the significance of the call struck home to them.

Yet their hesitation lasted only for a few seconds. The next moment they rose from their chairs in a body and stood upon their feet, a striking group of figures, of which the most striking was the Isle of Wight man Hendry, looming up at the governor's elbow.

Each of the others had his story, his fortunes to recuperate, his misdeeds to atone for, his sins to expiate, but none had a more romantic story than Hendry, for, as Governor Isham well knew, he had been outlawed from England in 1748 for smuggling and had taken service with the Hudson's Bay Company two years later. And yet even Isham did not know all the story. He did not know that Charles Clairvaux was the man who had sent his Majesty's revenue officers down on the smuggler's sea-world of the Channel where Agnes Tremblay reigned as queen, in order to rid it of Hendry.

The sentence of outlawry meant that any man might shoot him on sight and pay no penalty, but in the years that had intervened Hendry had met none who had dared to execute the sentence. He thrived still, beyond a doubt the pick of the hardy lot of volunteers, and Governor Isham laid a hand on his arm as an indication of his choice and motioned the rest of the company to sit down.

"It is gratifying to see such a ready response," he complimented them. "I wish I could send you all but I can spare only one. Anthony, you are my man. You will get your outfit, supplies and paddlers ready tonight and leave tomorrow. Your mission will be to see what de la Corne has done in the way of trade and if possible to divert it to James Bay. The Hudson's Bay Company will be responsible for whatever measures you may take. Now let us toast your journey."

The governor struck a bell in front of him. Gray Wolf, the bowsman, appeared immediately and at Isham's direction brought in glasses and wine.

"Come, drink together," Governor Isham toasted, "to the success of Anthony's journey."

The Hudson's Bay men tossed off the wine.

"Aye, success we drink!" they chorused. "Ill luck to the Montreal traders! Long live the company!"

As one man they boarded their glasses and stood like soldiers at attention. Isham struck the bell again as a signal for dispersal and Gray Wolf led the company through the open doorway, Anthony Hendry going out as he had come in, last of all.

AS HE emerged from the council-room Hendry's mind was in a turmoil of wonder and exultation, exultation that his desire was at last gratified, wonder that the winds of fate had blown friend and foe across the sea from the old world to the new to touch his life again.

He walked in a sort of daze but the realization of the necessity of preparation for the morrow swiftly restored his mental balance. There was much to do before morning, provisions and equipment to get ready, the canoes to inspect, the paddlers to pick; and he applied himself to the work with the celerity of the trained Hudson's Bay man. For the leader of his crews he had only one person in mind and he went down again to the Indian teepees where he had left Attickashish.

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"Attickashish, you dream true dreams," he told him. "The things you spoke of concerning the French you are indeed going to see with your own eyes. I, too, am going to see and you I take as my head canoeman. Choose the best paddlers among your hunters and get ready the crafts tonight."

It was a busy night for both Hendry and Attickashish. The post of York Factory was asleep and the teepees by the river-bank silent before they finished, but at dawn everything was ready, Attickashish's canoes were launched and, to a salute of trade-guns from his friends at the fort, Hendry and his party paddled up the James Bay end of the water-way that reached to Lake Winnipeg.

WEEKS afterward, bitter, forest-flayed, famine-ridden weeks when at times the only sustenance they had was the smoke from their pipes and the only salvation they had was a quick, sure shot at game, Hendry burst through the Winnipeg end and held on along the shores of the great inland sea. Threading the island mazes, he crossed over and safely made the mouth of the Saskatchewan. The Indians and the French had been before him, but he was the first bay man to dip paddle in the mighty river of the West.

With the transition from the swamp-lands to the park-lands through which the Saskatchewan ran the struggle of the journey grew less strenuous. The river flowed broad and fairly deep, winding from the plains, and the specter of hunger fled in the face of game roaming upon both banks. The exact location of de la Corne's post Hendry could not know. He could only seek it out by forging on up-stream and looking for it round every river-bend, but one day in mid-stream Attickashish raised his paddle and pointed shoreward.

"Look!" he urged. "It must be the French post at last."

Hendry stared sharply over his shoulder. On the shore he glimpsed a much used landing-place for canoes and beyond it the timbered bulk of a trading-house.

"Yes, Attickashish, it must be the French," he agreed, thrilling strangely. "Hudson's Bay men did not build that post. We do not notch our timbers that way nor run the eaves so broad. Paddle over to the landing-place."

The Hudson's Bay canoes swerved in their course and slipped across to the landing-place. Hendry knew that they had been sighted from the post, for two men immediately appeared and came down to the river-bank. They were dressed in the dress of French traders and the tongue they used to each other was the tongue of old France. Nor was Hendry at a loss to understand their dialect. In his smuggling days he had learned the language of the men with whom he traded across the English Channel, and his intimacy with the Tremblays of Cherbourg had given him a finished education in the language.

So he was able to catch the expressions of amazement with which the two Frenchmen greeted the appearance of strange canoes and as he listened he thought the voice of one familiar. He stared keenly. The man in front was a stranger but behind he recognized the high-cheeked, hook-nosed, black-mustached face of Charles Clairvaux.

At the water's edge Clairvaux drew abreast of his companion so that he stared full into Hendry's face as the latter's canoe nosed in to the landing-place.

"In the devil's name—Anthony Hendry!" he exclaimed in recognition.

Instinctively his hand fell to the pistol in his belt, but Hendry shoved forward a trade-gun across his knees, its muzzle all but touching Clairvaux's body.

"Take your hand away, Clairvaux!" he ordered. "There, raise it up. It looks better curling your mustache."

"*Mon Dieu*, but you bring the old world very near with your former smuggler's tricks!" breathed Clairvaux, his coal-black eyes regarding him fixedly. "Where do you come from now?"

"From York Factory on James Bay," Hendry informed him.

"*Diable!* That is a long paddle," blurted Clairvaux, raising his eyebrows in astonishment. "*Oui*, a long paddle and a far post. And you are bound?"

Anthony waved a vague hand westward.

"To the interior," he gave as his destination.

"But on what mission?"

"Why," smiled Hendry mockingly, "just to see the country. Governor Isham gave me leave of absence from the post."

"Have you a letter from the governor?"

"No, no letter, Clairvaux. I have a free hand. Now I think it is my turn. Won't

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you answer me some questions, you two?"

"Assuredly, *monsieur*," laughed the other Frenchman; "you might expect us to under the influence of a trade-gun. Let me introduce myself first. My name is Barbonne."

"What do you call this post you have built?" demanded Hendry.

"Fort à la Corne, *monsieur*," replied Barbonne.

"Is de la Corne at home?"

"No, nor anybody else but the two of us," Barbonne enlightened him. "M. de la Corne, M. Tremblay and Mlle. Tremblay and the servants of the post have gone to Montreal with the furs. They will not be back till the Autumn."

A shadow of disappointment crossed Hendry's face, but it was so fleeting that neither Barbonne nor Clairvaux caught it.

"You see," the vivacious Barbonne went on to explain, "your arrival as an accredited official of the Hudson's Bay Company creates a new situation here and it is necessary to have some one in greater authority than Clairvaux or myself to pass upon it. It might be against our master's interests to let you go on with your journey westward as you propose. We should detain you here till he comes back from Montreal. Is it not so, Clairvaux?"

"Yes, yes, he should be detained," coincided Clairvaux.

Hendry looked them calmly in the eye as he stepped out on the landing-place.

"You will detain me here no longer than I wish to stay," he told them bluntly, "and that will not be very long. All I ask of you is a few yards of river-bank on which to camp."

He turned to Attickashish and motioned him to commence the pitching of the tents, while Clairvaux and Barbonne looked on at the preparations and conferred together. At last Barbonne stepped forward.

"M. Hendry, you no doubt like your own quarters for the night," he observed, pointing to Anthony's tent, "but you must remember that I am French born, and although my comrade seems to bear you no love, I am not so inhospitable as to see you eat by yourself on the river-bank. You must eat with us at the post."

"Thanks," accepted Hendry, meeting him in his own spirit. "I promise that readily enough. We have been on short rations all the way from James Bay, you know."

But in the morning when Hendry went to breakfast at the post he found Barbonne alone.

"There was some trouble among the Assiniboins over their hunting-grounds and Clairvaux had to go out last night and settle it," Barbonne apologized for his partner's absence.

He was very polite, but although Hendry did not believe him he spent the visit more agreeably perhaps than if Clairvaux had been present. He dined with the hospitable Barbonne, inspected Fort à la Corne and exchanged experiences in general with his host.

Barbonne had seen the flash of the Hudson's Bay man's spirit when he hinted at detention and he dared not mention the matter again. After all, he concluded, it was de la Corne's affair. He himself had received no commands from his master to meddle with strangers who poked a trade-gun in one's stomach. All he could do was to report Hendry's passage to de la Corne and the others when they returned from Montreal.

Thus the next day Anthony met with no interference when he slipped his canoes into the Saskatchewan once more. Clairvaux was still away, but Barbonne came down to the landing-place to see Hendry embark.

"Well, Barbonne, I bid you good-by," Hendry told him as he took his seat. "Your establishment here has taken a good deal of our trade from the bay and I suppose you know we are going to try to take it back. But to show you there is no personal ill feeling between you and me here is a present in farewell."

Hendry cut off two feet of stick tobacco and handed it to Barbonne.

"*Merci, monsieur*," accepted Barbonne, "and to show you that your feelings are mine, here is a gift from the house of de la Corne."

He put into Anthony's hands a package of moose-meat.

"Pay us another visit when you make your return trip," he urged the Hudson's Bay man. "De la Corne and the rest will then be home."

"Never fear, I'll come by Fort à la Corne again," Hendry called back as he paddled away.

NOT many miles to the westward of Fort à la Corne Anthony selected a secret spot, cached the canoes and, back-packing the trade articles they intended to distribute among the tribes

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with whom they came in contact, went on afoot across the plains.

Now they were in the heart of the Assiniboin country, the hunting-bands of the Assiniboins all about them, and Hendry immediately approached them on the trails to try to induce them to come down to James Bay to trade. From camp to camp he went among them, but it was as he had feared. Clairvaux had been before. Well-primed with Clairvaux's wisdom he found them, a wisdom which they voiced as their own logic.

"Why should we journey to Hudson's Bay to get what these Frenchmen lay down at our teepee doors?" they demanded.

Their logic was unanswerable, argue though Hendry might, and yet he felt that if Clairvaux had not interfered he would have influenced them to make at least a trial trip down to the bay. More bitter than ever he grew at heart against the man who had outlawed him, and Attickashish, who loved Hendry as he had never loved his own kin, waxed positively vengeful.

"Here he moves a few suns ahead of us, telling the Assiniboins what to say," he denounced. "Let us meet him on the trail and make an end of him."

"Don't be a fool!" reprimanded Hendry. "Scratch Clairvaux and the Assoniboins who trade with him will hack us to pieces. We carry our lives in our hands as it is; and I want to see Fort à la Corne and York Factory once more. Keep calm, Attickashish. We can't move the Assiniboins, so let us try the tribes farther west."

Accordingly, in the face of the coming Winter, Hendry pushed farther on, sheer over the Red Deer River against the rampart of the mountains where his amazed eyes glimpsed the astounding spectacle of bands of mounted Indians on the trails. It was not known at the bay that there was such a thing as a mounted Indian. Hendry had never seen one. Attickashish had never seen one. None of the other paddlers had ever seen one. And the Frenchman Barbonne at Fort à la Corne had somehow failed to mention their existence. Yet here they were, hunters on the gallop, agile equestrians of the plains.

Blackfeet they called themselves, but Anthony named them the Archithinues and straightway swallowed his astonishment in an effort to get their trade. He demanded to be taken before their chief, so they rode before him to their village and Hendry heard Attickashish at his side grunt aloud with wonder at the sight of the teepees.

Pitched in two long rows they stood, over one hundred tents in each row, and as Anthony passed down the lane between them he saw the curious Blackfeet staring at him as at an apparition. He had never before seen a mounted Indian, but the miracle was not one-sided. They had never before seen a white man and theirs was the greater wonder.

At the end of the lane stood the chief's teepee, the chief seated inside with his advisers ranged about him. At Hendry's entrance he gravely seated the white man on his right and indicated that the ceremonies of the occasion might begin. First the pipe of peace passed round, then the feast of buffalo-meat and finally the Blackfoot chief demanded of Anthony from where he had come.

"I have been sent," Hendry spoke through an interpreter, "by the governor of the Hudson's Bay to invite his friends the Blackfeet to come down to his posts on that great water to trade. They will bring with them their furs and in return for the furs he will give them guns and powder to shoot the buffalo, bright beads and colored cloth to wear, knives and Brazil tobacco such as you can not get from the French."

"But your governor lives too far away," objected the old chief.

"It is not too far," Hendry argued. "See, I have come to you. Surely your young men can come to us."

The chief shook his head.

"No, it can not be. My young men ride on horses. They have never seen your canoes and they would drown themselves in them. Even if they could use the canoes they could not go. There would be nothing to eat. They have been raised from babes on buffalo-meat and they could not live on the fish you take along your rivers."

"Still they could shoot the moose and the deer as well as their brothers the Crees," Hendry hastened to point out.

"Perhaps they could if the game appeared," admitted the chief, "but I have heard that the game seldom appears. Here with the bow and arrow they can slay plenty of buffaloes and be fat and strong. Yonder on your Hudson's Bay men with guns in their hands often fade like shadows and die of starvation. So my young men stay on

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the plains. The chief of the Blackfeet has spoken."

IT WAS the final word. The decision of the Blackfoot chief was the decision of the Blackfeet people and it happened that their logic was the logic of the Assiniboins. Attickashish averred that Clairvaux had indirectly inspired them.

"It is his shadow we walk in," he brooded. "It is his own word on other tongues."

"But these people have never seen Clairvaux," Hendry pointed out. "He has never been among them."

"Yet the Assiniboins have seen them and told them what he said," Attickashish persisted. "He is a snake in the grass hissing evil counsel to them and while he lives the Hudson's Bay Company will never get the inland tribes to come to the bay."

"Attickashish," spoke Anthony prophetically, "I begin to see that they will never come anyway. The geography of the country is against it, but nevertheless we will get their trade in the end and we will get it by coming to them with our posts."

Attickashish stared at him fixedly, his stony face unmoved, but the surface-lights of his eyes shifting, an indication of surprize.

"You will build against the French?" he demanded.

"Just that," nodded Hendry. "The Hudson's Bay Company must wake from sleep, as the governor said, and throw a chain of forts westward from the bay. It will not be done in a day or in a year, but you and I, Attickashish, have opened the way.

"Listen! It will seem to the French as if we have failed in our mission, but we have not failed. We have made the presence of the Hudson's Bay Company a visible thing to these tribes. We have shown them our trade goods. And here I have drawn the locations for posts."

Anthony took from his pocket the rough maps he had made in his tent Winter nights of the waterways and trails and pointed out the possible sites.

"Some will be under the mountains," he explained, "some in the Red Deer country, some among the Assiniboins, some along the Saskatchewan itself."

"Now I understand," nodded Attickashish. "It is a good plan, but it will work better when Clairvaux is out of the way. We must first settle with him."

"Perhaps we will settle with him as we go back," brooded Hendry. "We are finished here. Tomorrow we start for York Factory by Fort à la Corne."

IT WAS the break of Winter as they came over the plains to their cache on the Saskatchewan River and drifted down with the stream. Knee-deep in the blaze of prairie flowers grazed the herds of buffaloes.

Overhead wheeled birds from the south on sun-warmed wings. All things hailed the exotic Summer with a clarion cry and under the universal urge Hendry's blood leaped gaily as he drove his paddle down to Fort à la Corne. Of vibrant life, of passionate love, of wilderness mating the sweet winds sang to him as he neared the post, and the whole rhythm of the song seemed bound up in the girlish figure he caught sight of upon the landing.

"By Heavens, Attickashish," he cried aloud in his exultation, forgetting himself and breaking his habitual reserve, "they are back from Montreal. She is back! Look yonder!"

Attickashish stared, shifting his gaze from Hendry's glowing face to the girlish figure upon the landing and back again.

"So," he nodded, wrinkling his face in a smile. "It seems that you had another mission."

"A personal one," confessed Anthony, "and it takes its natural place. The affairs of the Hudson's Bay Company come first, my own affairs afterward. Is it not so, Attickashish?"

"It is so," agreed the shrewd Attickashish. "But what will Clairvaux have to say about it?"

"I don't care a rabbit-skin what he says," growled Hendry. "This time he had better keep his hands off. Paddle in quickly."

From midstream he could glimpse Agnes Tremblay plainly and he realized that she was the Agnes Tremblay of old, queen of the smuggler's overseas world. Straight out behind her her golden hair tossed on the breeze from the river. Her white neck gleamed bare and beautiful with only a splash of gold on a thread-like chain at her throat, and under the shade of her hand her blue eyes flashed like amethysts as she stared up-stream at the approaching craft.

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With a flourish of paddles the canoes swept in and the smiling Hendry stepped out beside her on the landing.

"*Bon jour*, Mlle. Agnes," he greeted with a quiver in his voice.

A wave of color flamed over Agnes Tremblay's face and a mist came into her eyes so that she extended her hand half-blindly.

"Anthony, Anthony—welcome to Fort à la Corne!" she cried with a catch in her breath. "I was so sorry I was not here when you came last Summer."

"So was I, but it makes the welcome all the sweeter," breathed Hendry fervently, catching her hands and looking into her eyes. "It is heavenly to see you like this again. Why, the prairie Spring fairly blooms in your cheeks. No need to ask if you are well. And your father?"

"He leaves his regrets, Anthony. He is well and he wanted so much to see you again, but some one had to go down to Montreal with the first fur-brigade as soon as the river broke and M. de la Corne deputed him to go."

"By Heavens, that's strange!" observed Hendry suspiciously. "Couldn't some one else have gone?"

"M. de la Corne was disturbed over the presence of a Hudson's Bay man on the plains and he and Clairvaux wanted to stay at the post till you passed down ahead of them. They take the second brigade on to Grande Portage, you see, and I go with it to meet my father there. It was my opportunity to wait and see an old friend in a new land."

Hendry's eyes flashed tenderly into hers.

"That was good of you," he breathed, "but the trouble is that it is also an opportunity for somebody else. Agnes, I will never let you go down along to Grande Portage in Clairvaux's canoes."

"Why?" demanded Agnes Tremblay, astonished. "Will not M. de la Corne have charge? And has he not been a godfather to me?"

"Yes, but what is Clairvaux but a whelp and a scoundrel?" gritted Hendry. "I will tell you why. He is the man who betrayed me to the revenue officers at home, and he did it so that he might have the companionship of Agnes Tremblay undisturbed by me."

"He did that, Anthony?" cried the girl, her eyes flashing like jewels. "Have you proof of that?"

"I have it at York Factory, a letter in his own handwriting telling the officers where he could take me with a cargo of French brandy. Aye, and he sailed out with me himself that night."

A strange harshness crept over the loveliness of her girlish face and Hendry could see her clenching her slim white hands as if to strike some one who had put an insult upon her.

"The traitor!" she denounced. "The hound! Oh Anthony! He has taken my hand and my father's hand in friendliness these six years! *Mon Dieu!*"

She turned at the sound of the post-gate rattling back.

"There he is now with M. de la Corne. How can I look him in the face and not tear his eyes out?"

Clairvaux and de la Corne hurried down to the landing at sight of Hendry's canoes and the former cried a mocking greeting as he came.

"*Voilà*, you are back, Anthony!" he yelled with a sneering laugh. "But where are the Assiniboins and the Blackfeet who were to go down to James Bay to trade?"

There was the blaze as of lightning in the glance that Agnes Tremblay shot at Clairvaux for an instant before she introduced the master of the post.

"M. de la Corne, Anthony. *Monsieur*, the old friend of mine and my father's of whose passage Barbonne told."

De la Corne, dignified, courteous, garbed in the uniform of a French captain of marine, greeted Hendry politely. As urbane as Clairvaux was rude, he showed no enmity, yet his mind was not at ease. Here was the first collision between the French traders of Montreal and the men of the Hudson's Bay Company, and de la Corne knew that many men from the bay would follow in Hendry's wake.

Still, he was gentleman enough to keep his thoughts to himself.

"I understand you have been viewing the country to the westward," he observed genially. "I hope you have had a good trip. Fort à la Corne will no doubt come as a pleasant break to the monotony of your journey. Will you honor us by dining with us? Dinner is ready. We were just going to sit down. I had come out to find Mlle. Tremblay."

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DE LA CORNE led the way into the post. First he took Hendry into the fur-house, the loft of which was packed with skins traded in by the Hudson's Bay Company's own Indians, the Salteaux and the Crees, which were to go down to Grande Portage in the second brigade; then they passed into the dining room in de la Corne's house. In state they dined as befitted de la Corne's rank as a French captain of marine and lord of the Saskatchewan country as well. He was all ceremony in an effort to impress Hendry, but while de la Corne talked and impressed, on opposite sides of the table Anthony and Agnes sent back and forth a secret language of glances that undermined the master's ostentation.

"Now," de la Corne demanded when the dinner was done and Hendry rose to go back to his camp on the river-bank, "let us come to an understanding as to our respective movements. Naturally you will see that, with Hudson's Bay men in the country, I don't wish to leave Fort à la Corne undermanned. Also, I would very much like to start for Grande Portage with the second fur-brigade tomorrow. M. Hendry, could you solve the difficulty for me?"

"Quite easily," answered Hendry, his eyes holding those of the girl. "You will not need to delay your departure on my account. My party goes on tonight. You see I am due back at York Factory before the end of June and I have no time to waste. Attickashish, my leader of canoemen, breaks camp at nine o'clock. It is getting near that time now, so I must say farewell. Good-by, de la Corne. Good-by, Clairvaux. Mlle. Tremblay, *au revoir*."

Hendry bent low over the girl's hand.

"Agnes, you can not take the risk of going with them," he whispered. "You must come with me. Be at the water-gate of the palisade at midnight."

Hendry was gone from the room as he spoke.

IT WAS nine o'clock as he came out of the gateway of Fort à la Corne and immediately he broke camp and went through the ruse of paddling off downstream. As if bound for York Factory he went, but at midnight the canoes came stealing back to the water-gate of the fort where, out over a little cove of the Saskatchewan, one angle of the palisade was built on piles to afford a canoe-harbor. Hoisted on the shoulders of the paddlers, Hendry and Attickashish climbed up.

"Agnes, are you there?" he called in a subdued tone.

"Yes, Anthony, yes," came back the answer as a girlish form rose out of the shadows at the foot of the wall, "and my heart is up in my throat."

"Wait," begged Anthony. "I'll open the gate-bars. They are too heavy for you."

He dropped down beside her, Attickashish at his heels, opened the water-gate noiselessly and let the canoes without slip through.

"We've timed it well," Hendry exulted. "Everything asleep. Now for our own furs."

"What is that, Anthony?" cried Agnes fearfully. "What are you going to do?"

"Take back my own, *chêrie*," he told her. "Those furs de la Corne showed me should have come to James Bay. We gave a lot of debt to the Crees and Salteaux that we did not balance in the form of pelts. De la Corne stepped in, you see, though he knew those pelts had already been sold to us, so it is only just that I make him pay our loss."

Overhead was a fur-bridge, two long parallel timbers with crosspieces like a ladder reaching from the top of the water-gate to the loft of the fur-house, built for the avoidance of stairs and used for greater convenience in the loading and unloading of bales. Hendry swung himself up on it, and, with Attickashish still sticking to him like a shadow, ran up the slanting ladder and with some difficulty pushed in the little door of the loft.

"Be careful, Anthony," warned Agnes; "the post has quick ears in the night."

"Don't be afraid," he soothed. "It won't take long."

He did not need to strike a light in the loft. It was bright moonlight, a moonlight that flooded the loft like day, revealing the wolf-skins, fox-skins, the parchment-beaver, the martens, the cased cats piled up inside. Hastily Hendry and Attickashish ran them out to the waiting canoes. As Hendry carried the last one down he heard a cry of warning from beneath him.

"*Mon Dieu*, Anthony!" cried Agnes. "It is Clairvaux—yes and de la Corne behind!"

With a loud shout Clairvaux burst across the yard.

"Here, de la Corne, here!" he bellowed.

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"Come this way! Thieves in the fur-house!"

Clairvaux sprang upon the fur-ladder in his headlong rush and all in a flash he glimpsed the open water-gate, the Hudson's Bay canoes and the figure of Agnes Tremblay just inside of it, and instantly he understood.

"So it's you, Hendry," he snarled, darting at the figure bent under the last eighty-pound fur-bale. "So you've plotted with the girl, eh? But you'll never get away."

Taken unawares by Clairvaux's sudden appearance, Anthony had no time to slip the tump-line from his forehead and drop the pack. Half-crouching he met Clairvaux's attack, catching him bodily in his powerful arms to prevent his reaching the pistol in his belt. Wrenching, struggling, striking, they staggered backward and forward on the fur-bridge over the heads of the crews below—two gigantic figures carved black as ebony against the silver moon.

Hendry still fought under the handicap of the fur-bale, bent so low at times that he struck blindly with his fists, but at last with an agile neck twist he toppled it over his head. By chance it landed in Clairvaux's face, an eighty-pound missile, sending him reeling backward and, before the Frenchman could recover his balance, Hendry straightened up on the tips of his toes and crashed his fist under his antagonist's ear.

Clairvaux spun sidewise off the fur-bridge and fell in the water of the canoe-harbor. His left arm was anchored to the shoulder in the mire, but even as he fell he drew his pistol in his right hand and, lying thus on his side, snapped it straight up into Hendry's face above him.

In Anthony's deafened ears it seemed to go off like a cannon. He felt the wind of the ball as it passed his ear and it was an amazed moment before he realized that a larger weapon had gone off with the pistol. Then, to the right, he saw Attickashish's face over the smoking barrel of his trade-gun and saw Clairvaux roll over inertly into the water.

"So," nodded Attickashish as coolly as if he had made a successful shot at game. "The trade-gun was quicker than the pistol. But hurry, here are the French master and the rest."

Clairvaux's shouting and the clamor at the water-gate had awakened all of de la Corne's retainers and they came running like a wolf-pack at the captain's heels. Attickashish had just time to shove Hendry ahead of him into his own canoe, shove Agnes into Hendry's grasp and paddle off.

All around them de la Corne's men were rushing about under his exhortations, flinging canoes afloat and trying to close the water-gate which the Hudson's Bay men had jammed with a timber. They could not move it and they fell to attempting the blockade of the entrance with their craft, but with swinging paddles and gun-butts Hendry's fleet crashed into the opposing canoes, staving in or capsizing them and throwing the occupants into the river in one mad rush.

Once clear in midstream Anthony's canoemen raised a shout of triumph and their wet paddle-blades flashed on high, all silver in the moonlight.

"Long live the Hudson's Bay Company!" Hendry yelled back as his fleet foamed away.

No answer came back from shore. Hendry took a long look and turned to the girl beside him.

"We're off, *chérie*," he exulted, "but we haven't settled our destination. What is it to be? Shall we go on to York Factory or shall I turn a canoe aside at the Winnipeg to take you down to Grande Portage?"

"Anthony," faltered the girl, "there is only one thing that makes it hard for me to answer: My father expects me to meet him there on his return from Montreal."

"But don't let that weigh with you." Hendry urged. "Why go all that way to meet him when you can meet him here? You see I am coming in again this Fall to build a Hudson's Bay Company post. Besides, we will find a ship's chaplain on James Bay."

"Is that so, Anthony?" laughed Agnes happily, her amethyst eyes all tender in the moonlight. "Then to save your tired limbs a double paddle let it be York Factory."

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A DARNED GOOD POLICEMAN

by G. A. Wells

Author of "Promoters," "The Redemption of Bill Holland," etc.

IT WAS bitter cold. Moreover a heavy snow had been falling steadily for the past four hours and the ground was covered to a depth of several inches. Deep drifts had piled against fences and curbings.

An occasional car rattled up or down the street and one or two taxicabs scurried by, their wheels kicking up a mist of snow and their skid chains beating a clinking tattoo against the mud-guards. The arc-lights swayed jerkily in the wind.

It was in short the sort of night when ninety-nine of a hundred men prefer to sit before their warm firesides with their families and thank a kind fate for the tight roofs over their heads. That, or to lie curled snugly in soft beds under a smother of blankets.

Policeman Bob Farley—"Old Bob" they called him—disliked such inclement weather as much as any man, but in the seventeen years he had been on the force he had got used to the many varieties of weather handed the out-of-door man. Indeed at forty-nine a man has lived long enough to become accustomed to a great many disagreeable things.

At any rate as Farley now plowed his way along the street through the drifts, his heavy brogans crunching the snow whiningly beneath them, he made no audible complaints about the weather. The collar of his big ulster was turned high about his neck and ears, and those members were further protected by the jersey head-piece that left nothing but a small oval of his face exposed.

Yarn mittens covered his big hands. The natural grayness of his mustache was augmented by a veneer of snow.

When he came to the next corner he paused in the lee of a pole and, slipping the mitten from one hand, unbuttoned the breast of his ulster and the tunic beneath and plucked a thick silver watch from somewhere in the warm depths.

He found the time to be seven minutes to twelve. At midnight he had to make post and meet the sergeant at the corner of Fifth Street and Garland Avenue, one block south. On the corner of Fifth and Garland was a drug-store with a shed overhanging the sidewalk, and on such a boisterous night the shed offered a temporary haven of refuge for a storm-bound policeman.

Furthermore Farley always looked forward to and enjoyed that midnight meeting with Sergeant William Bowles. The smallest things to break the dull monotony of tramping a beat at night are sincerely welcomed by policemen.

Farley returned the watch to its inner pocket, rebuttoned the tunic and the ulster, put on his mitten and started out along Fifth Street, his head bowed to the chill blast of the wind and the wild swirl of the snow. When he came to the corner and

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slipped in under the shed he found the sergeant already there waiting for him.

" 'Lo, Bob," greeted the sergeant. "Fine night for polar bears, ain't it?"

"How'do, Billy," Farley returned the greeting jovially. "I'd pity a polar bear out on a night like this."

"Almost zero."

"Three above," said Farley.

The sergeant was standing with his back to the front of the drug-store, which was dark, kicking his heels lightly against the door sill and slapping his gloved hands smartly against his thighs. Farley brushed the worst of the snow from his cap and shoulders and joined the sergeant.

He got out a pipe and lit it. He and the sergeant were on intimate terms and a quiet smoke was as nothing between friends, though the regulations were rather strict about smoking on duty.

For perhaps all of five minutes the two men stood there without speaking another word, Farley puffing contentedly at his pipe and the sergeant kicking his heels incessantly.

"I had a squint at the final papers this afternoon, Bob," the sergeant broke the silence at last.

"Did?" said Farley briefly, and in a few moments added, "I didn't pass."

It was not a question that Farley asked; he merely stated what he believed to be a settled fact. And when he spoke there was a note of hopelessness in his voice, as if to say it was a foregone conclusion that he would not pass the mental tests required by the department civil service commission of those who seek to step from the lower to higher grades.

Farley had been going up for those annual examinations for the past ten years and more, and had never succeeded in passing. It was a routine lately viewed as comedy by Farley's brother policemen.

Therefore he was not the least disappointed now; he had some time ago resigned himself to the apparent fate of walking a beat the rest of his police days. Still, the lure of the annuals was always with him and he never failed to take the tests.

"No, you didn't," the sergeant answered, softening his tone as much as possible. "You made sixty-seven. It takes eighty to pass, you know."

"I guess that eighty's not for me, Billy," Farley said.

"It's a rotten shame!" the sergeant burst out rancorously. "I never could see the sense in those mental tests. Why can't a man be promoted unless he's able to spell twenty words right, name the capitol of Maine, mention the Presidents in order and all that truck the commission hands out to us at the annuals?

"What's education got to do with making a pinch or busting up a rough-house? Will a man make a good or bad cop because he does or don't know Paris is in France instead of China?

"How's this high-brow stuff going to make a man a good policeman? The —— with such rot!"

"It must be all right, Billy," said Farley, "else the commissioners wouldn't have it so. I guess they think education will make a man a better policeman."

"How can it make him better?" growled the sergeant.

"Well, an educated man's brain's trained to think faster an' truer, an' that's somethin' in a cop's favor."

"Poppycock! Why, I know a certain district captain right here in this town who made ninety-six when he went up for captain, and that bird ain't got enough horse sense to get in out of the wet. I don't say an education ain't handy in some lines, but I can't see where it's any particular advantage to a cop.

"I've made a good many arrests, Bob, and I never yet had to say the multiplication-tables or quote a chapter from Greek history before I could take my man in. It's all —— bunk!"

The sergeant snorted his wrathful contempt for the system of the commissioners in promoting men on the force.

"HOW did you make out?" Farley asked, turning the conversation.

"I crawled through by the skin of my teeth."

"Good for you!" exclaimed the other, catching one of the sergeant's hands and giving it a congratulatory squeeze. "I'm mighty glad to hear that, Billy. We'll be after callin' you lieutenant after the first of the year."

"That sounds fine coming from you, Bob," the sergeant said gratefully. "Don't you know, old man, I was afraid you'd be a bit jealous."

"Jealous! Me? Why should I be jealous of you, Billy?"

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"Oh, I guess there ain't any good reason why you should be, Bob," replied the sergeant. "Only you've been on the force a whole lot longer than me—nine years longer.

"It was you that broke me in on No. 15 over there in the factory district where the tough boys hang out, if you remember. I guess I've had more luck than you, that's all."

Farley laughed quietly and said:

"Billy, the Lord knows there ain't a jealous bone in my whole body. It does me good to see other people get the things I can't, an' since somebody's got to get 'em I want 'em to go to my friends."

"There ain't many like you, Bob," said the other admiringly.

"Pshaw!" dissented Farley with that jovial laugh of his. "The world's full of people like me; there's more of us than any other kind. We're just the common herd, Billy, an' that's the way it ought to be.

"There's got to be lots of common people at the bottom for the others to stand on. It wouldn't do for ever'body to be smart, else ever'body would go to the top an' then there wouldn't be any top worth tryin' for an' ever'thing would get stale."

"Bob, you're an optimist," bantered the sergeant good-naturedly.

"Optimist?" said Farley seriously. "Well, I am an optimist, Billy. I've got to be. Any man's got to be if he wants to get the most out of life, specially them that ain't got much.

"Take me, for instance. I'm a poor man, Billy; I ain't got much of what they call worldly goods. But for all that I got more than some of these millionaires here on Garland Avenue."

"I've envied you your family many a time, Bob, if that's what you mean."

"That's just what I mean," answered Farley. "I wouldn't take anything in the world for my family or any part of it. Them three kiddies of mine can't be beat, if I do say so myself as shouldn't. An' as for Gertie—well, you've been to my house often enough to know what kind she is."

"She's a mighty good cook, I know that," said the sergeant.

"Oh, that's only a small part of it, Billy," Farley hastened to deprecate. "Most women can cook an' keep house an' all that more or less. But it ain't the cookin' an' keepin' house an' things like that make a good home an' keeps a man content. It's havin' a wife that'll meet him half-way, or all the way if she has to for the matter of that. Some women's made to laugh an' be gay an' uppish while ever'thing's goin' all right, but let a cog slip somewhere an' they commence to whine an' nag an' get down in the mouth. They ain't got no backbone.

"The kind of wife that counts is the one that perks up her chin sassy as you please when things go wrong. They laugh whether there's a whole loaf in the box or none at all. The worst kind of luck can't break a woman like that, an' that's the kind of wife I've got.

"Sometimes I get mighty blue, what with thinkin' about things, an' here comes Gertie to set on the arm of my chair an' chuck me under the chin an' tell me how thankful we ought to be for all we've got. She puts the heart back in me.

"I don't say she ain't blue herself now an' then, because she is; she wouldn' be human if she wasn't. But you bet she keeps a stiff upper lip an' don't do no howlin' out loud about it."

He paused a moment and then continued:

"An' the good Lord knows the both of us got enough to be blue about these days. First it's one thing an' then another. Last year Gertie herself was down more than a month. Then only two months ago little Billy—he's your namesake, Billy—little Billy was took with pneumonia.

"We was scared to death. It was nip an' tuck whether Billy's goin' to get up again. Fact is, our regular doctor threw up the sponge. Told me I could have in a specialist if I wanted to, but he didn't think it would do any good.

"Well, you got to give your own a fightin' chance, sergeant. I had the specialist an' he pulled Billy through. Six hundred dollars for the specialist alone, not to mention our regular man, the nurse, the medicine an' all that. It stood me near nine hundred dollars.

"An' the —— of it was we didn't have nine hundred dollars, or even ninety dollars in cash on hand to pay the bills. A man with a family's got to spend lots of money, I tell you.

"We've been puttin' some of it in the home. Then it's shoes all around, an' the way the kids kick 'em out is a caution. Then they got to have clothes an' schoolbooks. Then groceries an' coal an' the

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house forever needin' somethin' done to it. Always somethin'.

"I often wonder how I manage to get it all out of my salary. Well, the fact is I don't; that's Gertie's doin's. She can stretch a dollar like rubber."

HE PAUSED to knock the ashes from his pipe and put the pipe away.

"You seem to be pretty well plastered with debt, Bob," the sergeant said sympathetically.

"Head over heels in it," replied the other moodily. "If a family man ain't gettin' much money debt crowds him hard. But we owe the money all in one place now. I had a paid-up life policy for three thousand, so we borrowed a thousand on that. But it's got to be paid back, Billy; it's got to be paid back right away. What if somethin' happened to me before we got it paid back? I'd turn over in my grave if Gertie an' the kids was left that way.

"Yes, sir, it's got to be paid back right away. It's fierce the way we're been skimpin' ourselves lately, cuttin' out somethin' here an' somethin' else there. It's su'prizin' how much you can cut out when you have to.

"That's some more of Gertie's doin's; I never could begin to do what she can with money. Lord, no!"

He threw out his arms in a gesture of complete helplessness.

"I thought that was about the way with you, Bob, and that's what gets my goat about these examinations," the sergeant grumbled. "Here's you—a good man—one of the best on the force—being held back from something better simply because you can't add, subtract, divide or some silly thing like that, as if everything depended on it. It's all —— foolishness!"

"If I can't pass I can't pass, Billy, but I need money terrible bad," replied Farley gloomily. "Three thousand dollars would put me on my feet in first-class shape.

"If I had that much I could pay what I owe on the policy an' still have enough left to take over that little cigar-store of Jim Haller's down on Fremont Street. Jim told me just the other day he wanted to retire an' said I could have the place for fifteen hundred.

"Wouldn't that fix me up about all right? No more worryin' about things then. Billy, the day's comin' when I'll be too old to paddle a beat, an' the way they're loppin' heads off here lately a man don't know how long he'll be swingin' a stick.

"I wake up in a sweat sometimes thinkin' about what would become of Gertie an' the kids if somethin' was to happen to me. The kids can't do anything yet; I married kind of late in life, you know."

"I was always afraid to get married, Bob," remarked the sergeant, "and of course I've had a better chance to save money. Not much, but a little. If I can help——"

"Much obliged, Billy," cut in Farley. "More debt wouldn't help me any. I'll get along somehow."

They said nothing more for a time. The sergeant got out a plug of tobacco, tore off a small piece and stuffed it in his cheek.

"And then when a man grabs off a little easy money he's a dirty dog," he said, putting away the plug and buttoning his overcoat. "I know a sergeant over on the West Side who picks up fifty dollars every month without turning his hand. All he's got to do is look the other way when he passes a certain joint over there."

"Hold on, Billy!"

Policeman Farley clutched the sergeant's arm in a tight grip. His lips came together in a firm straight line and his gray eyes snapped.

"I know you, Billy, else I'd likely rap you with me stick," Farley said at length, dropping his hand from the sergeant's arm. "I've been a policeman seventeen years come March, an' in that time I've learned a whole lot.

"Here's one of the things I've learned: If a cop ain't straight with himself he ain't straight with nobody else. Time an' again there's been a lot of jokes cracked about policemen, an' some of them cheap movin'-picture concerns have tried to make a bum out of him. But when you come right down to cases what kind of man is the average policeman?"

"Straight as a die," replied the sergeant with fierce promptness.

"Sure. No denyin' there's crooks on the force. You'll find crooks ever'where—in churches, lodges an' places like that where they ain't got no business. An' they're here on the force too.

"But the rank and file's made up of straight, square men. Straight cops ain't

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the exception; they're the rule. These cops that pull down the graft are freaks."

"I agree with you, Bob," the sergeant said with a nod.

"So help me, Billy," Farley continued earnestly, "I've often thought I'd rather be a good policeman than President. Seems to me like there's more to the job.

"When I meet a tax-payer on the street I like to think he's thinkin', 'There goes one of the men that makes my life an' property safe.' Of course, I guess none of 'em do think that, but it does me good to think they do.

"You take the average man an' woman. What do they think about the cop?

"To most of 'em he's just a man hired by the city to wear a uniform an' parade up an' down the street swingin' a stick an' wavin' to the motormen an' conductors on the cars, or passin' the time o' day with bartenders an' touchin' his cap to crooked politicians who maybe can lend him a hand.

"Then there's other people think he's only somebody to ask questions of. An' the beauty of it is most cops can tell 'em what they want to know.

"Say a baby's lost, or a pocketbook or somethin' like that. Somebody calls the police station an' back comes baby or pocketbook.

"When it's murder who works like a dog roundin' up the murderer? The blue-coat. If a house is robbed here comes the cop. Always on the job, Billy.

"Say, listen. The other mornin' I was on my way home from roll-call an' a little girl stopped me on the street an' asked me where a certain place was.

"She said her mother told her when she got that far to ask a policeman an' nobody but a policeman. This place where she wanted to go was three blocks back for me an' to get there the kid would have to cross car-tracks an' Main Street where the machines are thick as flies.

"Well, I took the little lady by the hand an' away we went. I lost about an hour's sleep, but what of that?

"I tell you, Billy, it made me feel mighty good to know some woman I didn't know an' who didn't know me from Adam knew I'd be there to take care of her little girl. It wasn't me, Bob Farley, she had in mind; she was thinkin' about a cop—any cop."

"I've had that same experience lots of times," the sergeant said.

"For the matter of that there ain't a cop on the force ain't done somethin' like it one time or another," said Farley. "But it ain't the things people see him do or he does do makes the cop the biggest man in the community, Billy. It's what he stands for.

"He's a big moral force for law an' order. Without liftin' his hand things run like a clock.

"Say, just let the blue-coats lay down on the job once an' people would see. Say they went on strike. Ever' bum an' hoodlum an' crook this side of —— would crawl out of his hole an' smash things. But they ain't got no heart for it while the cops are on the job.

"Yes, sir, the cop is the big moral force that keeps the whole works runnin' smooth. It ain't so much what they do as what they stand for. That's it."

"I believe you're right, Bob," said the sergeant.

"I am right!" declared Farley earnestly. "An' cops can't keep to taw if they graft, Billy. They can't. Any cop knows that an' most of 'em take it to heart. If the average cop can't be a good cop he ain't goin' to be no kind of a cop; he hands in his badge an' stick an' shucks off his uniform an' quits.

"There's dirty money bein' passed, sure. But I don't want none of it an' you don't want none of it an' mighty few cops do want any of it.

"Don't get the idea I'm braggin' about me bein' honest, Billy. I ain't tootin' my horn on that. You know the facts; you know what I mean.

"If a cop ain't straight with himself he ain't straight with nobody else. I like to look the tax-payer straight in the eye, Billy."

"Bob, Bob, you're a regular old philosopher. You astonish me," the sergeant laughed, looking at his watch. "And you're a darned good policeman on top of that, Bob. I won't forget this lecture in a hurry. I guess we'd better break up now so you can make your next post and report in on time."

"Well, I'm mighty glad to hear you passed the test, Billy," said the other, stepping out from the doorway. "Gertie an' me'll have you up to celebrate before long. Good-night."

"Good-night, Bob."

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POLICEMAN FARLEY strode out into the storm, which apparently had not abated the slightest bit. The snow was falling as steadily as ever and the wind, if anything, had increased in velocity. Farley was due to report in to the district station house from a box phone six blocks away an hour later.

Garland Avenue consisted of only four blocks and was considered one of the most exclusive residential districts in the city. Its residents were for the most part wealthy, which fact might easily be conjectured from the general appearance of the houses lining both sides of the street. Nearly all of them were of three stories—big brick and stone structures of ornate architectural design standing in spacious grounds.

At that season of the year, however, the great majority of the houses were deserted save for a few servants and caretakers, their owners having migrated to Palm Beach, Miami, Coronado Beach and other Winter resorts with mild climates.

Policeman Farley considered it somewhat of a treat to pass through that quiet thoroughfare with its atmosphere of culture and refinement, especially during the Summer months when the air was heavy with the perfume of flowers and blossoms and the myriad trees alive with chirruping birds.

But somehow after his talk with Sergeant William Bowles back there on the corner the grandeur of Garland Avenue made the policeman seem to himself so utterly insignificant. In talking to the sergeant he had dwelt at greater length and with more intensity upon his troubles than he generally permitted himself to do.

Now with his troubles fresh in his mind he felt depressed because of the tremendous contrast between his own modest station in life and that of the people whose houses he was passing.

Farley was not an envious man, but at the same time as he strode through the snow down the avenue he could not help wondering by what freakish twist of fate these people swarm at the very apex of life while he was destined to squirm along at the bottom in the dregs. Any family living along the avenue could have written him a check of sufficient size to put him on his feet without missing the money. They had more than enough. It all seemed so unfair.

Not that Farley would have accepted such a present without first earning it, because he wouldn't have done so. He let the idea percolate through his conscious thought merely as a pleasant possibility and not as an actual probability.

He walked two blocks, then came to a stop in the shelter of a huge leaf-stripped elm standing on the corner. He was breathing hard, for the labor of breaking a path through several inches of packed snow was terribly exhausting to a man of his age.

On the corner diagonally across the street stood a palatial-looking house whose many darkened windows served to accentuate the stark desertion and lonesomeness of the neighborhood. Farley had been on that beat long enough to know who lived in most of the houses. They were all in the city's "Who's Who." He knew that the house upon which his gaze was then fastened was the residence of Judge Walter Dowling, of the District Supreme Court, a fine old gentleman of about sixty-five.

Just how it came about that the judge and Farley were on such intimate footing Farley could scarcely say unless it was because both of them symbolized law and order and the similarity of professions had served to attract them. At any rate, meeting the judge quite frequently on the avenue or at his front gate theirs had quickly developed from friendly nods into a warm friendship.

The judge was a great hand to question people. That trait was no doubt a result of past training, for in his younger days he had been rated as one of the cleverest cross-examining lawyers at the bar. And no one with any sense of proportion could be offended at the judge's questioning, because there was always that in the manner of his questioning that made it plain enough he was genuinely interested and not merely curious.

Naturally both the judge and Farley had learned a good deal about each other's families. The judge honored Gertie Farley from afar as a good woman and a good wife, and the many pranks of the Farley children as related by a doting father were always a source of delight to the judge. For the past two years a Christmas box from the judge had found its way into the Farley home.

The Dowlings were the élite of the élite and very rich. They had a complete retinue of servants, horses, several automobiles, and the women folks wore fine

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clothes and displayed a wealth of precious jewels when on several occasions Farley had chanced to see them come down the walk and step into their waiting limousine bound to some social function or other.

Policeman Farley now thought of these things while he stood there looking across at the big house of Judge Dowling. He knew that the Dowlings were not at home; they never were during the cold weather.

They were at their villa down in Palm Beach. They had left behind a caretaker, a man, who lived somewhere in the attic.

But neither was the caretaker in the big house at the moment. Farley had made that round at an earlier hour in the evening and had met the caretaker coming out of the front gate. They had spoken and chatted together a few minutes.

The man had asked Farley if he would be so good as to keep an eye on the house, for he, the caretaker, was suddenly called to the bedside of a dying sister. The man had mentioned something about valuables in a wall-safe on the second floor and had pointed out the window of the room where the safe was located.

Perhaps Farley would not have recalled the fact of the caretaker's absence from the house so vividly to mind at that moment had it not been for what he saw at the very window the caretaker had pointed out to him. It was a bright light that swept across the window like a flash of lightning, as if an electric light had been snapped on and off in an instant.

When he saw the flash Farley's whole body jerked the least little bit and a look of wonder came to his gray eyes. For a space he carefully studied the angle between the swaying arc-light over the street-intersection and the window where the flash had appeared.

"It couldn't have been that," he muttered to himself. "The arc-light's between me an' the window, an' the window's turned almost edge-on to the light. Wouldn't be no reflection that way."

Had the caretaker returned to the house? Had his sister revived out of immediate danger?

Had the flash at the window been caused by the caretaker? That was very unlikely, for had the caretaker caused the flash it would have been a steady glow rather than a quick flash.

Bob Farley stood there wondering about it for several moments longer before he finally stepped from the curbing and started across the street to investigate. Before he reached the other side of the street he saw the flash twice again.

Call it instinct, intuition, premonition, what you will, Bob Farley felt satisfied that all was not as it should be in the Dowling home.

Passing in through the front gate, he walked quickly up the snow-carpeted walk to the house. From that point he began a tour of the building, his eyes keenly alert, and at length found an open window in the dark recess of a small enclosed porch at the rear of the house.

He also found foot-tracks, freshly made as he noted by their sharpness in the snow, leading up from a side-gate to the porch, and those tracks pointed toward the window and not away from it. The tracks and the open window were highly illuminating to Policeman Farley.

"Somethin' cock-eyed about this," he told himself. "I'll have a look just for luck."

HE GRUNTINGLY climbed in through the open window. Inside he paused but a few moments to unbutton his ulster and get out his revolver and a small electric torch; then, snapping on the torch, he started across the room toward a door on the other side.

Step by cautious step he went, his ears attuned to catch the faintest sound, his body set for sudden attack. He came into a hall, got his bearings toward a flight of stairs leading upward and snapped out the light.

Up the stairs he went, crowding the wall to take advantage of the firmer construction there, thus reducing the warning creaks to a minimum. Presently he came to the top of the stairs.

Not a light showed anywhere; not a sound but the far-away whine of the wind outside broke the silence. He risked a quick flash of the torch and saw a long hall lined on either side with closed doors.

He had instinctively kept account of his twisting and turnings and thus had not lost his sense of direction in the darkness. He was therefore able at once to select that side of the hall from which opened the door into the room at whose window he had seen the flashes of light from the street.

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He groped his way along the wall catlike, pausing momentarily at each door as he came to it and applying an ear to the keyhole. He passed four doors in that manner before he came to one from behind which issued almost inaudible noises.

His free hand found the knob of the door and began to turn it very slowly and softly. When the door was open far enough to admit his body he stepped through, revolver in hand ready for instant use.

What he saw brought a quick tightening of his lips and a firmer clutch on the revolver in his hand. Before the farther wall stood a man. The pencil-like ray of light from a flasher concentrated upon the circular nickel door of a wall-safe about even with the man's shoulders.

Even as Farley discovered him the man uttered a soft cry of triumph and swung the safe door open. From the interior of the safe he began to pull articles that scintillated and sparkled in the strong light of the flasher he turned on them one by one before he dropped them into a side-pocket of his overcoat.

By the dim reflection of the light from the man's flasher Farley noted a button—apparently the button controlling the lights of the room—sunken into the door-jamb at his elbow. Covering the man with his revolver, Farley set a finger on the button and gave it a quick push.

Instantly the room was flooded with a bright glare of light. And at the same instant with a startled oath the man at the safe wheeled and one of his hands dropped to an overcoat pocket.

"Watch yourself!" the policeman barked a warning across the room. "Keep your hands away from your clothes or you're a goner. Quick!"

For a space of seconds the other hesitated, then his hands lifted clear in the air. The expression on his face was one of surprize only. Keeping a wary eye on him, Farley passed over to him and frisked him of the automatic in his pocket.

"Now dump that boodle out on that table yonder," the policeman ordered with a nod of his head indicating a table near by.

The man obeyed without question, and it was a rich array of valuables his pocket disgorged. Farley estimated the value of the loot at approximately ten thousand dollars.

He scooped the articles fron the table and dropped them in one of his own capacious pockets. Then he pulled down the blind over the single window where the blind was up, a precaution his prisoner had evidently failed to take.

He turned an appraising glance on the man. He looked about thirty, though the dissipated cast on his face may have made him look older than he really was.

He was not at all bad looking and was quite well dressed in modish clothes. Had Farley met him on the street he never in the world would have picked him for a yegg, and Farley had a good eye for such things.

A quick glance about the room, which was plainly a lady's boudoir, showed the policeman a telephone standing on a little secretary over against one wall. He sidestepped to the instrument and picked it up.

"Just a minute, officer," called the young man, lifting a staying hand.

There was not the slightest trace of fear in his voice; it was surprizingly calm for one who had just been caught in the act of robbing the safe in another man's home. In fact Farley himself was not a little surprized at the total lack of emotion shown by his prisoner. Whatever the man may have felt beneath the surface he was serene outwardly.

"What's the big idea?" said Farley, pausing.

"Where are you going to telephone?"

"Where do you think?"

"Headquarters?"

"You said it," answered the policeman, starting to lift the receiver.

"Officer, don't do anything you'll regret," the other said warningly. "Let me have a word or so before you do that."

Farley wavered a moment, then replaced the telephone on the secretary.

"I don't want to hear any cock-an'-bull story about you havin' a wife an' fourteen children at home an' not a crumb of bread in the house," he growled. "What do you want?"

"Do you know Mr. Dawson—Mr. James P. Dawson?" the man asked.

Farley knitted his brows a moment, then said——

"You mean the Dawson that lives in the big house down on the next block?"

"Yes. Do you happen to know him?"

James P. Dawson, president and chief stockholder of the Dawson Manufacturing Company, one of the largest corporations in

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the city, was one of the very few men living on the avenue with whom Policeman Farley did not have at least a nodding acquaintance. This may be accounted for from the fact that the Dawsons were very proud and inclined to snobbishness.

"I know him when I see him, that's all," answered Farley.

"I'd like to have you take me down to his place to see him," the young man said. "He may do something for me—go my bail or something like that, you know, officer."

"What's Dawson got to do with you or you with him?" the policeman asked, puzzled.

"He's my old man."

"Huh? Your father?" said Farley in astonishment.

"He's been my daddy for thirty-one years and more. Knocks you off your feet to hear that, eh? It's the God's truth."

"Say, could you happen to be Edward Dawson now?" the policeman asked after searching the other's face a few moments.

"That's me."

"About five years ago your daddy sent you out West to take charge of somethin' of his out there, didn't he?"

The young man laughed cynically.

"That was a fairy-story cooked up for public consumption," he said. "My old man did send me away, yes, and he gave me two thousand dollars at the time. But he didn't tell me to go West. He told me to go to —— and never show my face round here again.

"You see, officer, I'm the black sheep of four sons in the family. Got in with a fast bunch at college. The old story—wine, woman and song, you know.

"I came home from college and tried to play the same racket here. Finally the old man kicked me out. I guess I had it in me to be a crook, and a crook I got to be. This is the first time I've been back in the five years."

"You'd of been a sight better off if you hadn't come back at all," said Farley.

"How well I know it," replied the other regretfully. "But I came back purposely to see the old man. Prodigal stunt, you know. Thought maybe he'd relent and kill the fatted calf. Nothing doing.

"Got down on my knees and begged him to take me in and give me another chance. Laughed at me. The old geezer wouldn't even stake me to get out of town again.

"I was down and out and desperate. I knew my old friends here would give me the cold shoulder and didn't know just what to do. Then I remembered this safe."

"How'd you manage to open it so easy?" the policeman asked curiously.

"Oh, I used to be a good friend of the family here," the other replied airily. "The daughter and I—Mildred is her name—we were exceedingly good friends. In fact, engaged at one time. I hear she's married now."

"Got two fine children to boot," volunteered Farley when the young man paused. "What else?"

"This used to be the sitting-room—Mildred's sitting-room," the other went on with a sweeping glance about the room. "I've spent a good many hours in this room with Mildred. It was she who let me in on the combination of the safe.

"It's a very simple combination, you know. Just spell Z-I-N-C on the dial by turning the dial to match those letters with the notch on the sleeve and there you are. Couldn't forget such a simple thing as that in a thousand years, and my memory's excellent anyhow.

"Of course they might have changed the combination in the five years, but I took a chance they hadn't. Sure enough they hadn't, so it was a cinch.

"I didn't expect to find anybody here at this time of the year—nobody but a servant or two; and I knew they had quarters in the attic and couldn't hear me down here. Did you notice that window down there where I came in had a broken lock? Careless people here, officer."

"An' you expect your old man to help you out of this?"

"He may. It won't do any harm to try him. You've got me dead to rights; no denying that. Still, a good lawyer can do wonders if he gets his price. Money will do a great deal, officer, and my old man's got barrels of it."

"Well, if you think your old man will help you I'm willin' to give you a chance, son," said Farley after considering the matter for a time. "Where can we get hold of your daddy on the phone?"

"He's at home, or ought to be. That's where I saw him yesterday. The rest of the family is down South somewhere; he had to stay over until later on account of a business conference. He leaves tomorrow

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to join the family, so I think he'll be sleeping at home tonight. Try the house; he's got an extension beside his bed."

Farley picked up the telephone again and eyed his prisoner narrowly for a moment.

"Now listen here, son," he said gruffly. "I'm doin' you a favor here. I'm supposed to report in at once about this, so you can see I'm breakin' a rule. I'm puttin' myself in your place, that's all.

"If you try to pull any smart tricks on me you'll regret it. Understand?"

"I've got a better chance out of this through my old man than trying to trick you, officer," the other replied. "I give you my word I'll be good."

AT LEAST ten minutes passed before Farley succeeded in getting in touch with a sleepy voice at the Dawson home. It was Dawson himself. The policeman introduced himself as a friend and mentioned that his, Dawson's, son wished to see him immediately on very important business.

"Not in a thousand years!" came back the emphatic refusal of Mr. Dawson. "I saw him yesterday and said all I have to say to him."

"Spill the facts," prompted the young man when this was reported to him.

"The fact is, Mr. Dawson, your son is now under arrest for tryin' to rob the home of Judge Dowling," Farley spoke frankly into the telephone.

He heard a gasp from the other end of the line.

"What's that? Who are you?"

"I'm Farley, the arresting officer."

"My ——!" came the hoarse reply. "Officer, you haven't—you haven't reported this to headquarters yet?"

"No, sir."

"Thank Heaven! Bring him here at once, and for —— sake don't report this affair until you have seen me. Come as quickly as you can; I'll be waiting for you."

"He'll see us, son," announced the policeman, hanging up the receiver and setting down the telephone. "We're goin' to leave this house the same way we come in. You lead an' I'll be right on your heels with the gun. Walk straight."

A glint in his gray eyes and a suggestive twist of the revolver in his hand emphasized his last sentence.

He snapped on his torch, turned off the lights in the room and they went out. When they had climbed out through the window on the back porch the policeman closed the window after them; then they proceeded down the avenue to the Dawson home in the next block.

Dawson met them at the front door and in silence escorted them into the library on the ground floor. There was a big mahogany desk with a telephone standing on it near the center of the room.

"So you have gone in for high crime!" said Mr. Dawson scathingly to his son when he had seated himself in the chair at the desk. "A common thief of the name of Dawson! My ——, Edward, if I had thought for a moment at your birth that you would have come to this I would have smothered you with a pillow then and there."

"I gave you a chance to help me, dad," the son retorted accusingly.

"Don't 'dad' me, you scoundrel!" snarled the father. "And don't try to throw it up to me that I wouldn't help you. Some time ago I gave you every opportunity to make a man of yourself. You threw it all away and I had to disown you and kick you out in self-defense.

"I know what your game is now," he went on savagely. "You know as well as I do that I'll sacrifice everything I have to keep this affair from becoming public.

"Good ——! The son of James P. Dawson arrested while trying to rob the house of one of my best friends and a neighbor! I can curse the day you were born!"

His face was pale with passion. One of his hands resting on the desk before him was clenched until it showed white at the knuckles and it trembled visibly. He sat there for some time wrathfully glaring at his son before he turned his eyes on Policeman Farley.

"Officer, did he ask you to call me up and request an interview?" he asked of Farley.

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Dawson shot his son a venomous glance.

"Did he tell you exactly what he wanted me to do for him?" he asked further.

"He said maybe you'd go his bail or get him a lawyer."

"But that wasn't exactly what you meant!" Mr. Dawson snapped at his son. "I know what you had in mind. You

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knew that I would move heaven and earth to get you out of this if I could."

"I thought you would," returned Dawson brazenly.

"You knew I would!" rejoined the other bitterly. "Officer, may I ask if this blackguard actually touched anything in Judge Dowling's home?"

"He cleaned out a safe in the Judge's house, sir."

"Hm! What became of the articles he took from the safe?"

"I have them here in my pocket to be used as evidence, sir."

"Was there anybody else present when you caught him?"

"A caretaker looks after the place while the Dowlings are gone, sir, but he wasn't in the house at the time," answered the policeman. "I saw him leave the house early in the evenin' on his way to set up with a sick sister. He asked me to keep an eye on the house, sir."

"Then at the time my son took the articles from the safe and thereafter there was nobody in the house except you and him?"

"Not to my knowledge."

Mr. Dawson spent an interval speculating upon the face of Policeman Farley.

"Officer, you no doubt understand the situation," Mr. Dawson said at length. "This boy is my son. I acknowledge him with reluctance.

"At the present moment you have him under arrest charged with burglary. That is a very serious offense against the laws of society. It means, if he is brought to trial and convicted, that he will have to serve a term in prison. That's true, isn't it?"

"Nothin' truer, sir," agreed Farley.

"It also means that the name of James P. Dawson will be associated with the trial with the result that his name will be dragged through the mire. He will share equally, if not to a much greater extent, in the disgrace of his son."

"I'm sorry for you, Mr. Dawson," murmured Farley sympathetically.

Mr. Dawson stopped and looked at Policeman Farley's face critically once more, then opened the top drawer of the desk at which he sat and drew therefrom a thin packet of yellow bills. He shuffled five of the bills from the packet and replaced the packet in the drawer. The five bills he spread out fan-fashion on the desk. Each of those bills was of the denomination one thousand.

"I think you told me over the phone your name was Farley?" said Mr. Dawson.

"Bob Farley, sir," replied the policeman, knitting his brows and looking at the yellow bills on the desk.

"All right, Farley. I guess you've heard of me before," said Mr. Dawson. "I have plenty of money to hire the best lawyers. I firmly believe that if this case went to trial my son would be acquitted. I am quite sure that on my account Judge Dowling would not push the charge. Therefore, under the circumstances, I think my son would have better than a fighting chance to go free at a trial."

He paused and looked at Policeman Farley as if expecting him to make some reply, so the policeman said:

"I have known some mighty guilty men to go free at their trials, sir."

"Exactly. And what has been done once can be done again," said Mr. Dawson with a nod. "Still, if this thing did go to trial the disgrace to my name would remain whether my son was acquitted or convicted.

"I am a very proud man, Farley. My name means a good deal to me and I'd like to keep it untarnished; at least until after I am in my grave.

"It is very strange how things sometimes turn out in this world," he continued after a slight pause. "Fate is a very curious thing. This affair, for instance. Nobody knows anything about it except us three.

"Just we three know that my son entered Judge Dowling's home with the intention of robbing it, and that he actually did open a safe in that house and take from it certain articles of value which you now have in your pocket. We three of all the persons in the world know this."

He stopped again and gave Policeman Farley the chance to say something if he so desired. But apparently Policeman Farley had no such desire, for he kept his lips together and continued to look at the five yellow bills lying on the desk. Mr. Dawson went on.

"Those articles you have in your pocket may be replaced in Judge Dowling's safe and no one will ever be the wiser. Therefore, Farley, the circumstances being what they are, do you know of any good and logical reason why more than we three should ever know about this affair? Do

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you know of any sensible reason why my name should be disgraced by the conduct of my son? Do you?"

MR. DAWSON ceased speaking and leaned back in his chair and fastened his eyes upon Policeman Farley's face. What he saw there gave him great hope that he had gaged Policeman Farley correctly.

And Farley, understanding then just what Mr. Dawson was driving at, had his own eyes riveted upon the five one-thousand-dollar bills lying there on the desk within reach of his hand. He felt quite sure that if he picked up those bills and put them in his pocket and walked out the door alone Mr. Dawson would not lift a hand to stay him.

It must be reasserted here that Policeman Farley was a scrupulously honest man. A dirty dollar had never knowingly passed through his hands. But after all he was human, and therefore susceptible to the various influences with which human beings are surrounded.

Never before in his life had he set his eyes upon a one-thousand-dollar bill. What proportion of men have?

And when Farley saw a bill of that denomination for the first time in his life he was hypnotized, bewitched, shaken from normal equanimity. To him it was the symbol of uncountable riches. What enormous possibilities were locked away in that yellow slip of paper with the bold 1,000's smirking at him from its corners!

And here was not one, but five such yellow slips of paper. One of them seemed a fortune by comparison with his own pitiful hoard. Five of them were far and away beyond any dream of money Policeman Farley had ever had.

What a world of things might be done with those five one-thousand-dollar bills—things that probably he would never be able to do. Gertie could have so many nice things, the children new clothes all around, he himself a neat suit to replace the threadbare one he had been wearing the past three years; the last of the payments could be made on the home, the remainder of what had been borrowed on the insurance policy paid back. And there was that cigar-store of Jim Haller's on Freemont Street to be had for fifteen hundred.

Five thousand dollars!

The magic thought was a fearful temptation to Policeman Farley. Here he was, on the edge of fifty years, practically unprepared for the twilight days of old age. A poor man with little hope of getting out of the rut in which he had been dragging his weary steps these many years.

Sergeant William Bowles had said that he was a darned good policeman. God knows he had tried to be.

And what had it profited him? What was his reward? Turned down year after year at the examinations with sickening regularity simply because he lacked the education to pass. Younger men in point of service jumped over his head. He was dead wood.

A darned good policeman. Yet he held to the level of mediocrity with the common herd. The irony of it!

And what was the end? The vista opened to him in all its wretchedness. One of the rank and file until he dropped in his tracks. Perhaps discharged.

Then what? Nothing beyond that—nothing left for him and his except the bitter adversity that fastens itself to the unfit, the derelict, the superannuated. There was a pension, of course; but that was as nothing.

And a cigar-store—a safe competence for life—to be had for fifteen hundred dollars.

And who would know if he picked up the bills and left the house alone and returned the articles in his pocket to Judge Dowling's safe? Mr. Dawson had set the thing in its proper light. Who would know? Nobody.

Too, what glory to him that young Dawson served a term in prison for robbery? The judge's valuables were safe. Nothing had been lost. And who would know?

Five thousand dollars! His for the little trouble of putting it in his pocket and leaving the Dawson house unaccompanied.

AND here Policeman Farley's thoughts switched to another track with startling abruptness. What was it that he had said to Sergeant William Bowles not longer than an hour ago? Had he meant what he said or was it all merely the inane mouthings of a man trying to make himself believe what he knew was not true and could never be true? Was it all so much bunk? Hot air? Antidote for an undercurrent in his consciousness that

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urged him to grab what he could and make the most of it while he was able?

"If a cop ain't straight with himself he ain't straight with nobody else!"

That truism suddenly hurled itself out of the very recent past and exploded like a bomb in Policeman Farley's conscience. It immediately transformed him.

Who would know? He would know! In his gray eyes burned afresh the fire of integrity and his lips twisted in a thin line of rigid determination.

He reached a hand toward the desk and picked up—the telephone.

"Twenty-one," he said to the operator, and a moment later:

"Headquarters? Farley, No. 37. Send a wagon for a prisoner to the James P. Dawson place on Garland Avenue right away."

He slammed the receiver back on the hook and faced the two men, who were staring at him with open mouths and fearful, unbelieving eyes.

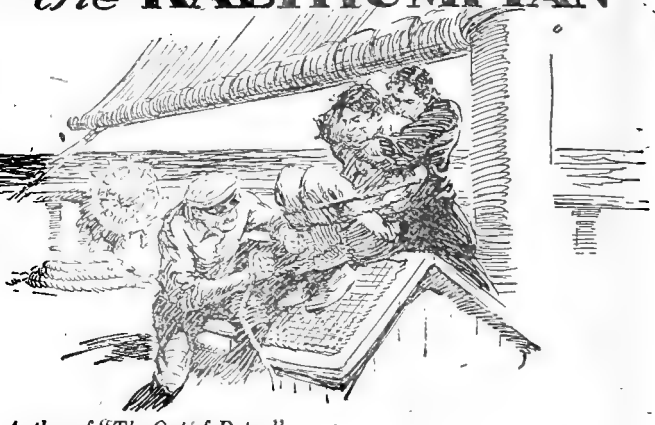
"Put away your money, Mr. Dawson," said Policeman Farley quietly.

The THEFT of the KALTHUMPIAN

A Complete Novelette

by

FRANK H. SHAW



Author of "The Out-of-Dates."

SOME time ago Fossdyke "swallowed the anchor." He is now a many-acred individual; and he will probably be the next master of the fox-hounds of the Whitney Dale pack. Being a onetime sailor, his ambition naturally is to do with horses.

On occasion he forgets the magnitude of his possessions and the social duties that he really delights to perform; he also gives his mentality a rest from the occupation of piling up worldly wealth and floats gently down the tide of reminiscence. He has expansive hours when I visit him in his Queen Anne country house, and flings the ball of conversation from Vladivostok to the Bristol Channel, from Torres Straits to Pernambuco; because he knows I know the Seven Seas, and we meet on a common understanding.

It was after a course-ful dinner that he blew a whiff of gray smoke from a Corona-Corona and said:

IT WAS when I had command of the *Kalthumpian*, before I picked up that never-to-be-forgotten derelict which started me as a ship-owner and bought this that I realized the immutable workings of Fate.

Piracy is deader than dodoes; the black flag is extinct; but criminality still goes on, and its disciples don't always confine their activities to the land.

Why should they? The land is too closely watched; there are men who specialize in tracking down the wrong-doer and in studying the psychology of the criminal. Shore-going criminals work on stereotyped lines in real life, though in books they sometimes launch out abnormally.

But the sea offers a wider field to the man who prefers to take what isn't his by force or strategy. Especially did it do so in my younger days, before the era of wireless telegraphy and the thousand-odd things that science had brought to the sailor's aid.

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The *Kalthumpian* wasn't much of a ship: a half-derelict wind-jammer, eight hundred tons burthen, built of teak and lined with greenheart; a ship of an old type. We went where we thought we could do most good; general trading up and down all the seas of all the world. We loaded copra in the islands and gum and pepper on the African coast.

Fifteen hands in the crew, and most of them half-castes; myself and the mates were the only worth-while sailors aboard. She was alive with vermin and ran about the most varied assortment of stinks that it's ever been my lot to encounter; but—man, she was my first command, and in those days I wouldn't have swapped her for Vanderbilt's yacht or the biggest Cunarder that ever sighted Tuskar.

I could tell you some yarns about that packet's doings. Not always quite within the law, perhaps, but—they were good times; and I'd have taken her into the gates of —— without furling the royals if opportunity had offered.

Yes, just for the pride of life and because I was that ship's master! To my mind she was fit to fight off a cruiser; she could outsail the *Flying Dutchman* and— But you know how it is.

It was—well, never mind exactly where—that I got wind of a big chance. It was a chance to make a man's mouth water, especially when you consider that I was always ambitious. You'll probably see later on why that chance came my way.

But I jumped at the offer and worked the old *Kalthumpian* to Berly Banone, using her own canvas when the wind was fair, and towing her with the boats when it was calm or the wind headed us. Not a bad bit of work—before the tugs were stationed out there.

I PICKED up the cargo I'd got wind of there and—it was worth all the trouble and more. Gold-dust formed a large part of it; ivory was there in plenty, and never a tusk that weighed less than seventy pounds. Red-gum copal in bulk; spices, rare woods—what a cargo it was!

The ship as she floated in that marigold-scented river was worth the whole contents of the Jewel House at the Tower if she was worth a cent. I think I'll forget my Maker before I forget the pride with which I paced her sun-bleached poop and listened to the thick gurgle of the river-water past her cables.

It wasn't a white man's country, mark you. The neighborhood was rank with devil-worship and the like; the inlying jungles were supposed to be haunted with the souls of unrestful women who'd died in child-birth.

But it had handed me out such a freight as would have made the skipper of an old-time East Indiaman—one of John Company's ships—dribble water from his teeth, and I wasn't disposed to quarrel with the place by any means.

I was going to take that freight to Santa Regina; and it promised to be nothing more than a yachting-trip. Old as she was, the *Kalthumpian* wasn't a bad sea-boat; and though economy had cut down her rig to handiness she could sail more than a bit.

I saw myself on the highroad to million-airedom as I worked her down river on the current with the boats twitching her this way and that when she refused to answer her helm and the high trees blinded her top canvas. It was hard work, and it was wearing work; the heat was bigger than anything I've ever known; and—we hadn't dared to fill up our fresh-water tanks at Berly Banone on account of the foulness of the river.

But eventually I got her out across the bar in safety and worked her with a steady beam wind to Cordilleras, where I anchored her and went ashore to attend to matters of business. I expect it was because of the short commons we'd been through in the way of liquid refreshment that, after I'd made all arrangements for watering and for fresh provisions and the like, I turned into Father Jerome's saloon for a drink of something with a tang in it.

I'm a cautious man—I always was a cautious man, believing with the Spaniards that no flies enter a closed mouth. To the agents and such-like folk I said no more than was absolutely necessary about the ship or her cargo or her final port.

But the stuff Jerome served me had a bite to it, and I'd been living on quinine for a month and more; and I suppose the stuff loosened my tongue-tackle. At any rate I found myself yarning quite freely with a pleasant-faced man of about my own age—a tall, slim fellow in white drill, with the

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cut of a naval officer about him. A seafaring man he was; not the smallest doubt about that.

He reminded me that I'd met him in my apprenticeship days, 'way back; we'd swapped cigarets in ships' boats lying off the Mole at Valparaiso; he remembered the day, even, when I was chucked into the calaboose for spearing the Port Admiral with the boat-hook because he'd rammed the gig I was in charge of.

A pleasant man he was, and not stingy—he set up the drinks a time or two, and didn't pin me down to trade-gin by any means. He was settled ashore, he told me, running a mahogany forest when he wasn't prospecting for gold; but he'd just come down to the coast for a breath of fresh air and to get over a bout of fever that had laid him by the heels.

So he yarned and yarned, sending royal-yards down in the good old-fashioned way till the sun dropped down behind the purpling edge of the sea and purple darkness said "Dismiss!" to the saffron and gold-crimson of the sunset sky.

It was an hour for confidences, because the even thrash of the surf on the beach was soothing, and the stars came out like paraffin flares, throbbing and pulsing as if they were alive; and the subtle smell of a West African port filtered up through the rustling greenery to our nostrils, and we were both no more than thirty.

You can blame me if you like, but you'd have done the same as I did. I mentioned that I was going to Santa Regina, and he fastened on that. Said he was well acquainted with the place and gave me some useful tips about making my landfall. There are two ways of getting to Santa Regina in a wind-jammer as you might remember: one north-about, the other south-about. The northern passage is the shorter but it has risks attached to it, because you run into the hurricane belt; and the southern, though a few days longer, is much the safer.

Being young and newly in command my every instinct was to make a quick passage; but that vein of caution that's lifted me out of the old-time grooves told me that safety was the main consideration. Lyall, as this chance-met companion of mine called himself, couldn't understand.

"With a ship like yours," he said, "you can go anywhere. She's weathered ten times worse than anything you're likely to meet. She'd laugh at a southerly buster or a typhoon."

I told him I was well aware of that, but that with such a cargo as I'd got under hatches I was taking no unnecessary risks. And we had another drink together to my caution. Then we got even more expansive, and before we parted I'd practically recited the whole of my manifest to him.

I was cold sober, if you can understand me; but—well, you lie up a stinking African river with no better company than an old mate who was at sea when your father was a child in arms and who never forgets it, and a second mate who'd earned his ticket in a Geordie brig and a Bilboa collier, and you might understand why I'd unbend when in company with an educated man of my own age.

I walked down to my boat as steady as a rock, and full of poetry and good thoughts. There was a girl at home—no, not Mrs. Fossdyke—that I was mighty keen on; and by the time I'd raised the gangway light of the *Kalthumpian* I'd got that precious cargo of mine delivered, received my percentage of the freight, bought a house and furnished it and got that girl snugly settled there with a drawing-room and a grand piano of her own and a baby in a lace-and-ribbon cradle with a uniformed nurse looking after it. You know how a man's fancies run when he's at peace with all the world?

What roused me from these reveries was the anchoring of a slab-sided tank of a tramp steamer. The crash of her cable startled me, and I very nearly fouled her. She'd anchored close to windward of the *Kalthumpian* and she was burning coal of the foulest kind you ever saw or smelt; and her smoke was driving down in filthy clouds all over my new white paintwork that wasn't properly dry. So I told her skipper what he seemed like to a decent sailing-ship man; called him all the clumsy-handed gardeners I could lay my tongue to, and then got aboard my own ship and turned in decently after a bath.

When I went ashore next morning to settle up with agents and the like I ran across Lyall again. He looked sprucer than ever, and told me that he was on the point of trekking away up-country again.

So we drifted into Father Jerome's again and continued the parliament; but this time, my caution getting a fresh grip on

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me, I said nothing at all about what was under the *Kalthumpian's* hatches. He was all the time urging me to take the northern route; once he even half-jeered at me for being a faint-heart; but I knew my own business, and I told him that even if it meant a month's longer passage I should go south-about.

"Well," he said genially, "I wish you *bon voyage* and all the rest of it, captain."

He was getting up to go when he said this, but he stopped long enough to repeat his previous tips about making the land and steering to clear the seaward set of the currents. Then we parted.

You'll probably wonder why I paid so much attention to a chance-met fellow of this sort. I'll tell you—or rather perhaps you'll see for yourself.

I FORGOT about Lyall completely except that occasionally, when taking a dog-watch stroll on the poop after we'd got to sea, I'd just go over some of his advice for future reference. Sometimes too I'd wish that I had him aboard as mate—for companionship, because old Griffiths was getting moldier and moldier every day, snarling in his temper and more overbearing than ever. To have a quick-brained, discursive chap like Lyall aboard in his place would have been something of a godsend.

But then I had to take back all my hard thoughts about the old mate because he took ill—very ill; and as I hadn't a single man for'ard whom I could trust to keep a watch I had to take four hours on and four hours off with the second and attend to old Griffiths in my spare time. It wasn't pleasant work; the worst of it was the mate was dying—not very rapidly, but surely. I knew that quite well; and—well, we'd sailed shipmates for a bit, and he had his good points.

If we'd sighted anything worth while I think I'd have signaled for the loan of a man who could keep watch; but for three weeks on end we just slugged along across barren water with never a sail or a tuft of smoke to relieve the monotony.

I wasn't having a great amount of luck on my passage, as you can see, but the day before the mate died we caught up the trades and romped along in the finest kind of style. That ought to have encouraged me and given me a better heart; but somehow, queerly enough, a growing feeling of apprehension took hold of me as the time went on.

I don't know why it was; I'm not at all an emotional man; but it was for all the world as if an intangible something were tightening little by little about me. Even the mate's death didn't relieve the strain; if anything, this portentous suggestion that something untoward was going to happen increased.

It wasn't atmospherical, mark you—nothing to do with prospective bad weather. We'd got a useful trade-wind, the glass was as steady as a rock, and we were shaping our course for Santa Regina without the need to start a ropeyarn or touch a brace.

No, it was purely psychical, something internal. The second mate hadn't noticed anything out of the ordinary, but then he was the sort of man who'd have told a comic story beside his own mother's deathbed.

Well, as I say, the mate died and the sense of tautness everywhere wasn't in the least diminished; and I read the service over old Griffiths and saw his shrouded body slide over the gangway, and the usual chokiness came into my throat and the mistiness to my eyes, as it always must come when witnessing that most lonely type of funeral.

On the evening of old Griffiths' death and funeral—a wonderful evening enough it was too, with the horizon a bewildering blaze of crimson and gold and violet, with little trade-clouds running rosy-red across the deepening blue of the zenith, and a laughing sparkle of the water that would have made me laugh at any other time—we sighted our first smoke. It was well down on the horizon; apparently a single-funneled steamer heading the same way as we were but well to the north.

Too far off to signal, of course; and the night came down as quickly as it usually does in tropical waters; and—that was the end of the stranger. At least we thought so.

Two days later in the glow of the dawn a man I'd sent aloft to overhaul the top-gallant buntlines reported an object in sight almost right ahead. He added that it was too small to be a ship and that he thought it was a bit of wreckage.

I nipped aloft myself, touched with

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curiosity, as every seafaring man is after being at sea for something like a month without seeing anything out of the ordinary; and with the binoculars I had a good look at the thing which we were closing on slowly. It was a ship's boat.

Nothing out of the ordinary in sighting a derelict ship's boat, eh? The sort of thing you might happen across anywhere, at any time—trivial flotsam, often enough with no story of any sort attached to it. Bottom up, bilged, awash, you can see them anywhere on the broad seas; and sometimes they're the only news the world ever receives of some good ship that's found the odds against her too great to combat longer.

As I stared at her I thought I saw something move above her gunwale. If I'd known—if I'd known! But I didn't—and humanity is a bit of a sailor man's character.

I took another look at her, and sure enough something was waving from the boat—a man's red shirt. If I shut my eyes now I can see that red signal, vivid against the brilliant blue of the wind-kissed waters.

I got her bearing and shouted to the man at the wheel to keep her away a bit until I brought the boat clean ahead. Then I went down to the deck and got the watch along from the deck-pump and the wash-down buckets, made the slight alteration in the trim of the yards that was necessary and began, as folks will, to wonder what accounted for the presence of this boat just here.

It was a little out of the ordinary—in trade-waters. Off the Horn, off the Agulhas, anywhere where bad weather is usually met, yes; a derelict boat might easily be met; but here in the fine-weather zone with an untroubled sky and a sea that was a medley of rippling laughter, no—it was uncommon.

"Must have been a fire," I decided. "That's it; a ship afire and abandoned in a panic by her crowd."

Understand, all the while the oppression that troubled me was tightening—tightening. I went into the chart-room and studied the barometer, tapped it, waited and tapped it again. There was nothing out of the common there—it stood at 30-18, which was just a steady trade-glass. And as firm as a rock; not the slightest suggestion of a pump about it. No, what was in my brain wasn't due to the weather.

From the forecastle head I could see the boat plainly when I went for'ard. It was a ship's life-boat; judging from the black streaks visible on the bow, a steamer's boat. You know how the funnel-grime drifts down along the boat-decks when wind and rain beat it down.

Two men were at the oars, pulling slowly and as if worn out with fatigue and exposure; another was in the stern-sheets. As we drew nearer I could see the latter was bearded; that he wore a tattered slouch hat pulled down over his eyes; that he lolled back against the stern-post half-collapsed as if clean at the end of his tether.

The watch were considerably interested as you may imagine; they neglected their scrubbing and crowded to the rails to watch. I told a couple of them to get up a heaving-line or two and the end of a light rope, and to rig a bosun's chair from one of the after-davits in case the castaways were too exhausted to come aboard by their own efforts; and then went aft to handle the ship, because it isn't just as easy as falling off a log to bring a ship alongside a small boat when there's a six-knot breeze blowing.

But there were no obstacles as it happened. I backed the mainyard nicely and the old *Kalthumpian* stopped as neatly as if she were a man-o'-war's picket-boat, with just the drumming of wind in her canvas to remind us that we were at sea; and the life-boat ran alongside and caught the first rope that was thrown.

I suppose I was too lordly-minded to trouble about salving that boat, though it was certainly worth a goodish few dollars. anyhow I told the boatswain to heave a holystone through its planking as soon as ts occupants were brought aboard so as not to leave it floating at large and causing all kinds of queer stories to be told; and before doing the ordinary civilities to the men I'd rescued I had the mainyard braced up and filled on everything, and got under way again.

YOU know what sailors are when they pick up castaways; they treat them as mothers treat their first children. My crowd helped these unfortunates aft to the poop and then stood about with their tongues hanging out like dogs who've brought a bone to their master's feet. The man with the beard—

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bright gold it was in color—slipped from between their hands and slid to the deck with a low groan and lay on his face. The other two sort of clung to one another, trembling.

"What ship?" I asked, and one of the two mumbled something that I couldn't catch.

They were all rough and unkempt, dirty too, and—well, forbidding-looking. But they were obviously under the weather; and it's no kindness to put a lot of questions to men who are probably near their last gasp, and as there promised to be weeks before us in which to elicit their story I told the men to assist them below to the cabin, called the steward, ordered him to attend to them as if they were new-born babies, and carried on with the ship's work.

Somehow I couldn't help thinking in a vague kind of way that I'd seen the golden-bearded man, he who'd been in the boat's stern-sheets, before. But I didn't worry much about that; my main thought was one of satisfaction that I'd happened across the castaways in time to save their lives. I promised myself an interesting forenoon when I was relieved in finding out their story, and wondered why the oppression did not lift from my senses.

At eight bells the second mate came up to relieve me; the commotion on deck hadn't disturbed him, and it hadn't been necessary to turn out the watch below. But he'd seen the castaways; they were still eating in the saloon, he informed me.

No, they hadn't told him much—they were part of the crew of a steamer that had caught on fire almost a week before, and had burnt herself to the water's edge before the few explosives she carried went up and scuppered her. They had been adrift for four days, and as they had had to leave their ship in a hurry ultimately they hadn't time to see to the boat's provisioning very carefully.

I was hungry, and wasn't for stopping to talk much; but just as I was giving my relief the course and the usual information about the work in progress and so on the three castaways came up the companion-way. The man with the golden beard walked feebly, his head sunk on his breast. The others were a bit heartier; they smiled as they came closer.

Close alongside, the biggest man stumbled and sat heavily down on the quarter-bitts. I bent over him, thinking he was fainting, and—felt something cold and metallic thrust sharply against my ribs.

Now I know the feel of a revolver-muzzle well enough to recognize it without any long-winded explanation. Naturally enough I was quite unarmed; indeed, but for the Smith & Wesson that was down in my private chronometer locker, the entire ship carried nothing in the way of armament; and though there was a heavy brass belaying-pin in the rail, a loose one, it was just out of reach.

So I did nothing as, I suppose, most other men would have done nothing.

"It's my game, skipper," said the bearded man, and—it was the voice of Lyall that he spoke in. "Don't do anything foolish, because I should just hate to blow a hole through you, and this is a four-fifty-five *with* man-stopping bullets in it."

He raised his voice and said to his precious companions—

"Bring that man along here and let's have a talkee-talkee."

The second mate came without demur—I could hear his teeth chattering. He had tried to be something of a bucko with the men, but he was white-livered when the push came, as I knew. They rounded him up like a calf and made him sit on the bitts aft alongside me, for Lyall ordered me to seat myself there, and I wasn't a miracle-worker so I had to obey.

Oh, yes, it was Lyall right enough; my pleasant-spoken acquaintance of the shore, my drinking-companion of Jerome's saloon. I was a fool not to have recognized him before, before ever I permitted the swab to set foot on the old *Kalthumpian's* deck.

The surprize of it all was staggering. Here was a man whom I'd imagined to be somewhere up in the heart of Africa, dominating me on my own poop out in mid-ocean, and only the Almighty knew how he got there.

"What arms have you got on board?" he asked me quickly, this pleasant-spoken visitor. "Come on, skipper, don't let us have any black looks. You told me you thought no end of yourself for picking up the freight you did; and now that I've managed to pick it up out of your fingers, in a way of speaking, you ought to be full of admiration instead of hatred."

He laughed at this sally. I must say he was a cool bird.

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I was trying to think, twisting my brain to find some way out of the dilemma; as yet I hadn't quite realized the full significance of the occurrence, and cold-blooded piracy didn't enter my head; but I heard and felt the snick of the revolver's hammer as he drew it back with his thumb and got a look into his blue eyes, and—I told him about the Smith & Wesson in the chronometer locker. It would have been the same if I hadn't; he'd have found it.

"Go down below and find it and bring it to me here," Lyall said to one of his pals. "And make a thorough search whilst you're down there; shoot any one who interferes."

The man trotted away below. It all seemed unreal enough to me even then—something in the nature of a practical joke.

But about fifty seconds later I saw that this was anything but a joke. The man who had newly relieved the wheel, a big, decent seaman—a white, called Cronnick—evidently understood what was taking place, and decided to bear a hand. He left the wheel, got hold of two of the battens of the cabin skylight, hove one like a boomerang at Lyall's head and then, with the other swinging, dashed toward us.

Lyall dodged the flying bar of iron and blew Cronnick's brains out without turning a hair or even quickening his breath. Before I realized what was happening, before the sailor's dead body crashed to the planking, the .455 was against my ribs again, and the hot feel of it through my shirt gave me the shivers in large doses.

"That's that," said Lyall. "Watch these men, Bunting, while I have a yarn with the crowd."

AS YOU might expect, the hands were coming aft in bunches, drawn by the report of the pistol. Lyall handed us of the after-guard over to the care of the scoundrel he called Bunting and nipped like a deer to the break of the poop.

He had two heavy revolvers in his hands when he spoke to the crew. His voice held a rasp that carried conviction and brought them up as if they'd hit the face of one of Sydney Heads.

"I've just blown the head off one of your mates," he said, "for interfering. I'm willing to blow the heads off the lot of you if you interfere. I hold the royal flush this game, and there's no limit. Come on if you're tired of life."

It was a good bluff and it went. Men in the bulk are much like sheep; these men wanted a lead and it wasn't forthcoming.

There were enough of them to eat Lyall and his precious companions, but—to attack meant that one or more would go down, and none of them wanted to be the sufferers.

They shuffled—I could see and hear them where I sat, there on the after-bitts under the menace of Bunting's pistol, which seemed to be as big as the mouth of a railway tunnel—they turned away with that slouching affectation of indifference that men adopt when they know the odds are not in their favor; but Lyall halted them with a sharp word.

"Understand," he said, "there must be no tricks. Any man who tries fooling gets shot. You there—hold up your hand."

One man obeyed, and as he lifted it Lyall fired. The bullet went through the fellow's palm, though he was thirty feet from our chief pirate.

It was good shooting, though the whole affair was a bit melodramatic. But Lyall knew the sort of people he had to deal with: men to whom the melodramatic appealed strongly; simple men with strong passions.

Sarcasm or ordinary threats would have left them unmoved or merely resentful; an actual wound amongst their number opened their eyes to realities. The hit man yelped, and the rest simply scattered.

Lyall came back after that, and the man he had sent below to search for arms joined him with my Smith & Wesson and an ancient pin-fire weapon that he had unearthed from the oddments locker in the second mate's cabin. These two pistols were promptly thrown overboard.

"Go for'ard and make a thorough search," said Lyall to his companions.

He certainly wasn't leaving anything to chance. I heard afterward how that search was conducted. The two men went to the starboard forecastle, ordered the hands out on deck and lined them up under the menace of two big revolvers.

Whilst the man called Bunting covered them the other—Seymour I heard him called—went into the sea-parlor and rummaged everywhere with the most comprehensive thoroughness. Anything that could be used as a weapon was hove overboard.

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By the time they'd finished, the ship, never equipped for such an emergency, was as helpless as a fainting woman in a street riot.

And whilst this was going on Lyall was telling me what he had in his mind. He had quite worked his plan out. No getting away from it, that man's teeth were all firmly fixed in their gums!

His plan was to take charge of the ship and carry her to an obscure South American port, where the officials were open to bribery, and there dispose of all her valuable cargo in his own immediate interest. All my beautiful ivory, my gum, my shellac and my gold were to be looted from me as though I were an old-time Flushinger and he a red rover of the most approved type.

"It's hard lines on you, skipper," he told me with a grin that was less likable than his frown. "I'm sorry for you, but self-preservation is the law of nature, and I'm out to restore my fallen fortunes. This cargo that you so considerately told me about ashore there is too big a thing to be lost.

"I do not wish to hurt a man who put up the drinks as generously as you did at Father Jerome's shack; but you'll understand that if you try any tricks you'll suffer; there's too much risk in this job I've tackled to add any more."

"You're a brave man, if a bad one," I told him. "But do you think you can handle this proposition? I'm not a man to have my ship pinched from me like candy from a child. There are only three of you, and we are seven times as many."

He grinned again at that and said:

"Don't try any tricks. Three men armed are more than a match for your twenty men unarmed. And you've already seen we understand our business."

He waved one of his pistols toward the dead man who still lay on the deck—a nasty sight! And a sort of resignation got hold of me then. I never remember to have felt so helpless in all my days. There I was, a young man, strong, not a coward under normal circumstances; but simply scuppered at the outset, and doomed to see my ship run away with!

Riled? I assure you I was riled. But I determined to say nothing just then; though you may believe I had no intention of letting the job go through to its finish.

There would be some time before the *Kalthumpian* reached this den of scoundrels to which Lyall intended to take her; and anything might happen in the meantime. Not that I wanted the top of my head blown off, though, like Cronnick's.

If you want a wholesome check put on any original enterprise you might possess, stare for a dozen minutes or so at the messy corpse of a man you'd known a little while before as a hale fellow, vigorous, intelligent and not at all lacking in pluck. That will teach you more caution than ever you learnt at your initiation! Cronnick was the deadest thing I ever remember to have seen.

The two men who had gone for'ard came aft after a while and reported that everything was safe in the forecastle. As the articles provide that no foremast hand may bring weapons of any kind aboard and as all my men were more or less pier-head jumps who had pawned almost their last stitch of clothing for a final bust ashore, it was hardly like that such a negotiable thing as a revolver would figure amongst their kits anyhow.

But they found a knuckle-duster and a slug-shot; and these were promptly slung into the water, to put temptation out of our way. Meantime the ship was steering herself, to all intents and purposes, just coming up to the wind and falling off again as neatly as if she were being steered by a competent man. A good ship, the *Kalthumpian*, and she was beautifully balanced.

"We'll outline the working scheme," Lyall said. "Now, skipper, I know something about a ship; but I'm afraid I'm shaky on certain points of navigation. I hold a mate's ticket, so I'm not altogether a fool at the job—just a bit rusty in details, in a way of speaking. So we won't have any false courses entered up on the chart, for a commencement. Where's your mate, by the way?"

"The mate died—of blood-poisoning," I told him. "He stuck the end of a wire fastening to a soda-water bottle into his hand just between the thumb and palm, and though I did all I could for him he went under. An elderly man, and hadn't any constitution worth speaking about."

He nodded at that. I don't know what it was that prompted me to trump up such a yarn on the spur of the moment; looking at it in the light of later events, I think the words were put into my mouth.

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"YOU'LL have three extra watch-keepers anyway," said Lyall. "We don't want you to overwork yourself, skipper. But remember what I say: let's have no —— funny work, *if* you please.

"This ship has to be taken to Buenos Rios without undue deviations, and she'll be a much healthier ship for all concerned if she goes there quietly. I've no particular cause to dislike you, and I should not be exactly happy to see you squirming about on your own poop with a bullet in your liver; but I'm out to carry this thing clean through, and any man who gets in my way will bite off more solid trouble than he's able to chew with comfort.

"You'll do all your navigation under my eyes, and I know enough to be aware when any cooking is going on. It's in your own interest to be peaceable.

"If you behave yourself decently you'll probably get your ship back when we've unloaded the stuff she has aboard. But you won't be allowed to sail until we're clear. Now, carry on."

He had evidently planned it all out very carefully. No getting away from it at all; Friend Lyall had a big brain. I tried to think out some reasonable loophole because it hurt like the —— to have my ship snatched away from me in this barefaced way, but puzzle over things as I might I could see no outlet.

It was for all the world like being in a tramp steamer with a couple of destroyers running alongside with their guns trained on your boiler-room and their torpedo-tubes cleared away for action. I might have made an attempt to throw off the shackles of this ridiculous captivity, but I shouldn't ever remember making that attempt.

The way they worked was something in this fashion: One of the three was always on deck aft—maintaining an unbroken vigilance. We knew they were armed to the teeth and unscrupulous as they make 'em; and there was nothing to be gained by resisting.

"Now what we want is a cabin where the watch below can pig out," said Lyall.

"You'll be taking mine, I suppose," said I, and didn't like the thought of it, because my cabin had photographs of that girl on the bulkheads, and cushions she'd make on the settee and so on.

Lyall grinned at me mockingly.

"You'd like that, wouldn't you?" he said. "Get us nicely penned up down below, scrob the man who was on deck and turn the tables on us, eh? Not if I know it, skipper, old bird. Wait a bit till I look round."

He went away and explored the cabins thoroughly. When he came back he seemed quite satisfied.

"We'll use the mate's cabin," he said. "It has everything to recommend it. There are two berths in it for one thing, and it opens out on to the deck. No one can approach it without being seen. And I don't suppose your late mate will mind strangers using his gear."

I didn't say anything to that; it wasn't my place to question their rulings; but I admit I was thankful they'd left me my own cabin. A man gets attached to his own quarters when they're as comfortable as mine were.

"If you carried a half-deck it would have been better still," said Lyall; "but as that's lacking we'll make shift with Mister Mate's bunk-house."

He had made a wise choice, which showed me how well he understood his job. The *Kalthumpion* was an oldish type of ship with a full poop. But she was rather quaintly arranged in some respects. Instead of having a door that opened out on to the maindeck from the cabins, she was sealed up.

Did I tell you she was a dirty ship in a seaway; filled herself systematically? It was after she'd had her cabins washed out a dozen times or so that they fastened up the doors and bolted steel plates over them. To get into the saloon and my cabin you had to mount the poop and descend by the companionway; and the ports that gave on the quarter-deck were only little affairs, hardly big enough to allow of a man's head protruding. If any one were down in the main cabins, shutting the companionway door would imprison them quite nicely.

The second mate slept forward abaft the galley in the old-fashioned way, but the mate's cabin was on the forepart of the poop, opposite my cabin. Only, at some time or other the mate's cabin had been altered.

Instead of having to descend to the saloon and walk along an alleyway to reach

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his room as I had to do, the mate could just open a door that gave on the quarter-deck and walk straight in to his quarters without disturbing any one. You've probably seen ships fixed up like that.

It was a wise arrangement; the mate could get out on deck in a hurry without disturbing any one. What had been passenger-cabins were ranged alongside his alleyway; and it may be that influential passengers had complained about the noise of a man tramping past their doors in heavy sea-boots. Anyway there you were; the mate's bunk made a fine strategic position.

Lyall was very perky about everything, and evidently wanted things to be as pleasant as possible for every one aboard. Breakfast was announced by the time we had straightened things up and got Cronnick's body carried to the after-hatch and an ensign spread over it; and Bunting, Lyall and myself went down below.

There'd been a hiatus in the commissariat arrangements, as you can imagine, when these pirates showed themselves in their true colors, and the breakfast that had been got ready for me was spoilt; but the mulatto steward, although he was scared out of his wits and his teeth were chattering like castanets, managed to get another meal ready in double-quick time.

"Just help yourself, skipper," Lyall said as we sat down to table. "Eat hearty."

And he and his companion in crime refused to touch a bite until they'd seen me eat and drink; then they helped themselves out of the same dishes. They were running no risks of being poisoned!

I tried to make the best of a bad business and ate as heartily as I could. Lyall, satisfied that all things were in order so far as food was concerned, waxed communicative. He was no end encouraged at the smooth sailing he had encountered.

"I made up my mind to try this gamble as soon as you and I had that yarn in Jerome's saloon," he informed me. "It was the talk of the gold-dust that got me cold. That and the ivory. Knocking about the world in the way I have done, I knew exactly the spot where I could dispose of that good stuff."

"I didn't see any particular reason to be frigid toward him. After all I was booked to spend several weeks in company with these swagger rapscallions, and I decided to make the best of it. The fact that both of them with some ostentation had laid their cocked revolvers alongside their plates as they sat down decided me on that course perhaps.

"What I can't understand," I said, "is how you managed to time everything so nicely."

Lyall said it wasn't above explaining. Seemed rather proud of the way he'd worked it, indeed.

"IF IT hadn't been for that providential tramp happening into port just as you were sailing," he said, "I admit it might have been difficult. But as it happened she was bound for the South American coast. When I got that from her Portuguese skipper I knew that it was meant that I should try this game on. You'd told me where you were bound and which route you were taking; and the Portuguese steamer was taking much the same course.

"So I dashed the skipper a hundred dollars by way of cumshaw and made him my friend for life. I really believe, skipper, if I'd asked that dago to do it he'd have run his ship alongside you and carried you by the board; but that idea didn't appeal to me—too many to share the loot, you see. No, my plan was better.

"After we sighted you and forged ahead I got him to give me a boat and some food just in case of things miscarrying, although there wasn't much chance of that happening; and he stopped and lowered us away, waved his cigaret-smoke darkened hand to us and trudged away to the west as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened. I'd pitched him a yarn that I'd killed a man and was escaping from justice, and he swallowed it just like a baby swallowing milk."

"But man alive," I said, "suppose we hadn't happened across you? Or supposed we'd passed you in the dark?"

Lyall shrugged his shoulders at that.

"Not much fear," he said. "I wasn't taking any chances. I knew just what speed you were making—measured it from the tramp when we passed you. I knew you were in the trade-wind belt, where the breeze would blow as steady as a rock for weeks at a stretch, and I timed things so that you'd find us at dawn. Simplest thing in the world, and I've proved it was a workable plan because I'm aboard you now."

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No getting away from it; he was a cool enough scoundrel; a clever man with the courage to carry his plans through, and that's a dangerous combination. It's as well for the world there aren't many like him; when you get brains and pluck in combination with unscrupulousness you get a force to be reckoned with. Anyhow Lyall's daring had brought him to success because he had us all in the hollow of his hand and we couldn't do anything to help ourselves.

Not that I intended to take it lying down, mark you. Although it seemed to me that there was no way out of the mess, it got my back up to see the cool way the thing had been done; and a man doesn't throw away his first command without some good reason.

But when I looked at Lyall's face and saw the steely glint of his eyes and the revolver beside his plate, and when I thought how quickly he'd shot Cronnick, the position seemed just about as hopeless as it possibly could be.

After these two had finished their meal—and they ate like starving men once they started—they went on deck and the other fellow came below. He wasn't for taking any chances either, and by way of staking his claim he put the fear of death into the steward—made him run twice or three times round the cabin on penalty of being shot; made him serve his meal on his knees, and generally threw his weight about.

It made my gorge rise, and once I started in to interfere, but he clipped the hair away from above my ear with a bullet, and the hot wind of it past my face scared me cold. The report of the shot fetched Lyall's face to the skylight like one John Smith; and he ordered me up on deck without any unnecessary politeness being wasted.

"Don't try any monkey tricks," he instructed me. "You're kept alive on sufferance only, skipper, and I daresay we could make shift to take this old packet of yours to port without you. Take my tip and resign yourself to facts."

I protested that there wasn't any need to add to my humiliation by compelling me to witness the bullying of my own people who'd done nothing.

"Seymour is a nasty man to cross," Lyall said. "He likes killing for its own sake, and his plan was to come aboard and finish off the lot of you. Best not cross him any more than you can help if you wish to keep your health."

I made up my mind that if a chance came to turn the tables I'd remember Mr. Seymour for a double dose of whatever was coming; but that was all I could do. Then I affected to put a good face on the matter and got my sextant and worked out a longitude, which I ought to have done before but for the events happening as they did.

Lyall got the mate's sextant and took a couple of sights and worked them out independently, and when he showed me the result I knew there was no chance of hoodwinking him; he was within half a mile of my position. No, look at it as I might, I was snookered; and the sooner the rotten job was over and my precious cargo stripped clean out of the ship the better, I thought. Man, but it jarred!

Just as we'd compared observations Lyall yawned and said he thought he'd turn in for a spell. I was feeling pretty sleepy too, so off we went below.

Lyall turned into the mate's bunk after giving close instructions to Seymour to keep a good lookout and to see that not a living soul went anywhere near his door. When I got on deck again I discovered a roughly painted notice-board fastened up abreast of that cabin-door, and on it was printed:

CERTAIN DEATH TO COME WITHIN TWELVE FEET OF THIS.

But once down there in my cabin I tried my hardest to think out a possible way of escape. It seemed so utterly ridiculous that as many men as we numbered, in our own ship, should be held up in this mad fashion.

But then I thought of the revolvers and the sort of shooting these blackguards could do, and—twice as many men as we carried wouldn't have been of any use. My only hope seemed to be in sighting another ship and communicating to her in some way what was happening aboard. This notion got hold of me and on the spur of the moment I wrote out an account of what had happened, put the paper in a bottle and corked and sealed it carefully.

Then I dropped it quietly through the port; and within a minute of its splashing overboard I heard the crack of a pistol and the smash of broken glass, and knew that

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there was nothing the matter with Seymour's target-practise. After that I went to sleep—though my dreams were anything but pleasant.

First thing Seymour said to me when I appeared on deck was:

"No more bottle messages, cap'n. I can hit a cork at twenty yards six times out of six.

"I saw the paper as the bottle smashed, and I shall tell Lyall as soon as he's had his calk. And it won't be the bottle next time; it'll be the bottle-thrower."

I felt cold about the spine at that and decided the case was more hopeless than ever.

I SUPPOSE there's no need to weary you with an hour-by-hour account of our doings aboard the old *Kalthumpian*. Her deck was never deserted by one or other of the latter-day pirates; and there was always a show of pistols.

They had eyes like a cat's; they seemed to be able to see round corners. If two or three men clustered for a yarn they were ordered to break away—nothing in the nature of concerted action was to be allowed, you see.

Oh, they had their scheme complete down to the last comma. I'm surprized Lyall, with his brains and consummate nerve, didn't try to steal a republic or something on the grand scale.

They made no objections to our burying Cronnick in the approved fashion; indeed Lyall and Bunting took off their hats when I started to read the service and stood quite respectfully at the break of the poop during the entire ceremony. But they carried their pistols and were ready for any demonstration.

Funny, wasn't it? I really believe that often enough your cold-blooded criminal is anything but a heathen at heart.

I was rather interested to see how these three would behave during the dark hours, which were their critical time. But they had the situation sized up to a hairpin. They understood humanity well enough to know that the forecastle crowd wouldn't take any action without a lead from aft; therefore we two, the second mate and myself, were the only ones who needed serious watching.

And the pirates kept regular watch and ward—four hours on, eight hours off. They were wide awake throughout their watches; nothing seemed to escape their notice.

During the second dog-watch that first night I hadn't many opportunities of watching their alertness because they were all on the poop, yarning and making fun of one thing and another; there was plenty of laughter; and though they bagged a bottle of grog from the cabin and drank it they did not seem to feel its effects in the least.

In obedience to Lyall's orders I laid off the *Kalthumpian's* new course on the chart and made such alterations in course and trim of the yards as were necessary; but all the time he was bending over me I was thinking—

"Oh, you plausible *Claude Duval* kind of a blackguard, if I could only get back at you; if I only could!"

But what was the good of thinking that way, I'd like to know?

I didn't get much sleep in the first watch; my brain was too excited to permit itself to rest. All kinds of foolish, monstrous plans went surging through it.

I got the idea that it might be possible to smash the man on watch without making any bones about it and without noise, and then to slip down and fasten up the door of the mate's cabin and starve the beggars into surrender.

But that wouldn't have been an easy task; and then too when I remembered that only a screwed-up door stood between their quarters and the main cabins and that a determined man could easily break through, I realized how hopeless reprisals were. Besides there were those cursed revolvers.

No wonder white men can overawe a hundred times their number of savages! I'd seen what pistol-work at close quarters was like, and it wasn't at all pleasant; and the first man who got foul of Lyall & Co. was in for the same dose that Cronnick got.

Lyall kept the middle watch with me. He was very wide awake, everlastingly on the alert. I flatter myself that I can keep a vigilant watch, but he had me beat to a frazzle.

The man at the wheel didn't shift a spoke without attracting my warder's attention; if I checked for a second in my pacing of the weather poop he was looking up at me, and—I could see the shimmer of the starlight on his infernal pistols. But somehow up there under the stars the position didn't

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seem nearly as desperate as it had done down in my stuffy cabin; and I found myself growing something like cheerful in spite of the odds against me.

I was whistling a music-hall tune as I paddled up and down, and Lyall came and joined me, falling into step and 'bouting ship face to face with me in approved shipboard fashion.

"I think you're a wise man to take it philosophically, skipper," he told me in his refined, gentleman's voice. "If you like to give me your word of honor not to make any attempt to get rid of us I'm quite prepared to lift this blockade one time and stop playing policeman."

"I suppose you'll blow my brains out if I refuse to give parole?" said I not without bitterness.

"No," said he; "I don't pretend to be a cold-blooded murderer. I've shot a man or two in my time, but never have I butchered one.

"You're thinking about that man of yours who went out? Well, it was a case of him or me, because he meant killing; and I preferred it to be him.

"You can please yourself, of course. It would be more comfortable if you gave your word to do nothing to interfere with the ordinary course of events."

"Well, I won't do it," I told him curtly. "As long as I'm master here and in my sound senses I reckon I'll act up to the traditions of the service and do the best I can to safeguard my ship."

"Hear, hear!" he said with a mocking laugh. "Loud cheers from the gallery, skipper! Don't think I blame you, though——"

"I'd be a white-livered swab if I took all you've handed out to me lying down, wouldn't I?" I asked. "You've made me a thundering fool on my own poop, and a man doesn't forget that in a hurry. If I see a chance of ousting you and your ship-snatchers I'll do it."

"That's all right," said he without any trace of anger. "I'd do the same myself in your place. If you can take this ship back from me, though, you're a cleverer man than I take you to be."

When we were relieved at four o'clock, however, he insisted on accompanying me down to my cabin, and once there he made a pretty thorough search to see if there was anything stowed away that might be used against him. He also locked up the medicine-chest and confiscated the key, laughing as he did it.

"Now I know what a desperate character I've to deal with I'll neglect no precautions," he said. "And it's not an unknown thing for a desperate man to put poison in people's drink."

It wasn't in my mind to do anything in the Borgia line, however. I said so, but throughout the trip he insisted on my testing every dish that was served first, and out of every bottle of grog that was opened—not a few—I got first drink.

No, he wasn't neglecting precautions. But before we went below that middle watch he talked a lot and what he said was really very interesting.

Talk about adventures! I've seen a few, but he left me at the post. He'd been everywhere and he had done everything worth while.

If he'd only steered a straight course that Lyall might have made himself famous; but there was a kink in his cosmos somewhere and the straight, legal path had no fascination for him.

"I know I shall come a big mucker some day," he confided to me; "but when it does come it will be a scrap worth seeing. I'll go out fighting, the same as my old Viking ancestors did—I think I'm a throwback to type, skipper—and taking big risks has always fascinated me.

"But it's good while it lasts; and my experience is that the bigger the stakes you gamble the bigger the winnings.

"Some men would have been satisfied to hocus you and pinch your gold-dust; but that's only pocket-picking according to my way of thinking. When you come to think of it, it's a nervy proposition, pinching a ship on the high seas without so much as a three-pounder to do the trick with."

BUT he didn't crow for long; he wasn't the man to throw away his chances by too much bragging. He went on yarning and yarning, and his knowledge of the byways of the world simply staggered me.

He even asked me to chuck up decent living and join him in a scheme he had in mind. He believed that if he brought this present transaction off safely he stood a good chance of doing something very much bigger in the filibustering line.

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By six bells in that middle watch he had made himself President of a South American republic, looted its treasury, pinched its best battle cruiser and taken to the high seas again as a pirate pure and simple.

"The way I'd like to finish," he said, "would be to tackle either a Yank or a British war-ship of my own weight or more and go down with the Jolly Roger flying—blow up the magazine, or something of that sort. That would be something like a sensation—wouldn't the yellow press go wild over it?

"But now, just to prove that our wheels are well oiled and in thorough working order, we'll try a bit of drill. Stow yourself away in the companionway, skipper, in case my chaps start shooting."

I didn't know what he was driving at, but I soon learnt. I got snugly into the companionway and he shouted—once. Then he fired his revolver in the air; and before the report had died away two figures came up the poop-ladder like rockets.

By the light of the late moon I could see them distinctly; they were in their shirts, but each man had a gun and their faces were the faces of killers. They ran straight aft; one to the wheel, the other to where Lyall was standing. You couldn't conceive of men turning out with such smartness.

"It's all right," I heard Lyall say. "Not so bad, not so bad; but you should have come up *different* ladders. If there'd been any hanky-panky work on they'd have got you both. Try different ladders next time; don't forget."

It was as if he had voiced my own thoughts. I was watching the business through the chartroom windows—the chartroom was only a tiny place without a bunk in it—and as the men came up that weather ladder the thought came to my mind that if I got the second mate to help me we might contrive to scupper the fellow who had the watch, and then smash down the other two as they came out.

But I relinquished the plan with a big sigh of regret. Anyway there wasn't an opportunity of contriving any plan with the second mate.

In the first place I was anything but sure of him; he hadn't even made a cheep all this time; and the bluster was out of him like the air out of a pricked toy balloon.

In the second place, as there were only the two of us, and one of us on deck constantly, plotting wasn't possible; we couldn't get our heads decently together. There was always one or the other of the pirates near at hand, listening, as I knew, to every word we said. And we were never below together.

If the mate had been alive it might have been different; and I found myself longing a lot for the gruff old chap, who in spite of his faults was no coward, and would have gone down fighting rather than take the ignominy that came our way.

Lyall sent his beauties below again after a chat with them and resumed his yarning; but I'm afraid I wasn't a very interested listener, because I was wondering whether I oughtn't to make a bid for freedom and chance the luck. Even if I was killed outright, I thought, it might be possible to get rid of the blight we had aboard—but then what would have been the good of that? The second mate was no good as a navigator, and he would probably lose the ship as well as the cargo if she were left to him.

And, too, I couldn't help thinking of the girl at home—I thought at that time it would break her heart if anything dreadful happened to me.

Well, things went on that way for a week and nothing happened to vary the monotony. On the eighth day I felt a faint stirring of hope—just a twinge. I was on watch, and a man working aloft reported a ship's smoke ahead.

Now I hadn't been idle all this time; I'd been puzzling my brains to devise a plan of squaring things up decently; but no great success had come my way because you can not even imagine the helplessness of a man when he knows that any action of a suspicious nature that he makes renders him liable to be shot outright.

To be sure I had done one thing: I'd written the story of what had happened in full, giving the destination of the ship and the course I tended to make, and I'd sealed several copies up in bottles and lowered them quietly out of my port at night, so there couldn't be anything of a splash; but nothing had resulted from that action.

You see, I couldn't even make my bottles conspicuous by fastening a flag to their necks, because the wind was getting fitful, and I knew we were running into a belt of calms and variables; and there was always

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the chance of the wind falling light or calm just after I'd lowered a bottle, and that would have meant bigger trouble after the fellow Seymour's threat. Because the sight of a floating bottle with a streamer of bunting tied to it would have aroused every suspicion there was about; and if the ship got becalmed no power on earth or sea could prevent those bottles showing up.

Of course Lyall & Co. would at once have a boat lowered out and sent to investigate, so—I didn't tie flags to my bottles, and I didn't get rid of them except when the wind was blowing pretty freshly.

BUT hearing that a steamer was in sight caused me to taste fresh hope. The thought that it might be possible to signal news of what was afoot inspired me, though I became dispirited a moment later, remembering that Lyall wouldn't put up with any nonsense.

Still there was proof that something existed outside the *Kalthumpian* and that was a relief, because the false atmosphere was wearing my nerves thin and ragged at the edges. My main hope was that the stranger might prove to be a cruiser and that I could do something that would compel her commander to take effective action. Even Lyall, gambler as he was, wouldn't attempt to bluff a war-ship with his everlasting revolvers.

Then there was the possibility of this stranger, going on a directly opposite course to us apparently, picking up some of my bottles and coming along after us to make inquiries. So I was titillated with quite a pleasurable excitement as you may imagine and found out that I didn't loathe the sight of Lyall quite as much as I thought I did.

But, bless you, it was no use—no earthly use. Lyall seemed to read my thoughts, for he whacked up a sarcastic laugh and said:

"He won't help you any, skipper. He'll probably speak you, and it would be fine for you to spin him the whole yarn from one end to the other; but you're not going to do it, you know—you're not going to do it. Ugh-ee-ee."

I can't exactly reproduce that yawn he gave; it was a stretcher.

"I fancy I ate too much dinner," he remarked. "That cook of yours is a regular artist at his job. Get a hand or two along to rig an awning aft here by the wheel, skipper; otherwise you'll have me me falling asleep."

But it was only his jesting; he was really as wide awake as a cat. I got the awning rigged and he coiled up under its shade—this was in the early afternoon; and he ostentatiously gave a lot of attention to his pistols. He also demanded that I should give him the copy of the International Code of Signals.

So there I was; no chance of slipping a warning through, because there isn't a sailor man alive who can carry the whole of the code in his memory.

Up came the steamer, a big fellow enough, a tramp of the better sort with a fair turn of speed, but not at all the war-ship of my hopes. She started signaling quite early along; the usual compliments ships exchange in deep water.

Lyall, with the code on his knees and a revolver laid handily, read out the meanings of the flags as I reported them to him. The stranger asked what ship we were, and I was for hoisting our code number, but Lyall wouldn't have that at all, and trumped up a false number for us from Lloyd's List. We told the steamer that we were the *Saragossa*, bound from Sierra Leone to Pernambuco, and he informed us that he would report us.

Then Lyall told me to make another signal, which I did, asking for our position, which is the usual thing a wind-jammer does when signaling a steamer because the latter type of craft, as you know, have better opportunities of checking their chronometers, and are also supposed to be officered by better navigators. I read out the flags as they were shown in answer, and Lyall jotted down the readings from the code.

"Just to prove that you're not playing the goat, skipper," he told me, although there'd been a fat lot of chances to do that; he checking my navigation every morning and noon, and occasionally working out a star or two himself when they came out.

As it happened the steamer's position was within a couple of miles of ours, so Lyall's suspicions were set to rest, and he even favored me with a compliment on my good navigation—not that I wanted 'em.

I was very strongly tempted to semaphore the steamer, but it would have only been a crass exhibition of folly, for as soon as my warder tumbled to what was afoot he

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would have shot me out of hand. Anyhow what earthly good would it have done?

The average tramp steamer isn't equipped for dealing with pirates; in all likelihood that packet hadn't even a rifle aboard. The best she could have done would be to ram us and cut us in two, and the cargo that I'd worked so hard to get was just as well in Lyall's care as at the Atlantic's bottom.

So the tramp flagged us a *bon voyage* and trudged on past us, and in a while she was out of sight astern, and all the hope that was left to me was that she might pick up a bottle; though even so I didn't see how it was to benefit the unfortunate *Kalthumpian*. No; our honest ship had been stolen as if she'd been a diamond ring in a jeweler's showcase and not a policeman in sight for a mile or more.

"Jove, but I'll be glad when it's eight bells," Lyall said after the signal flags were folded away in their locker and the poop was tidied up again. "Let's see—what did we have for dinner?"

He looked at me a bit suspiciously, I thought, but I was able to face him with a clear conscience.

"You can't have doped the grub," he said after reflecting a while. "You had as big a helping of everything as I had myself. But I feel sleepy—darned sleepy."

I said nothing one way or the other. But I did a good deal of heavy thinking, I can assure you. I'll tell you later on.

LYALL got up from under his awning and began to pace the deck, yawning at intervals, and occasionally he rubbed his eyes.

"What I need," he said, "is something to interest me. I'm getting bored with your companionship, skipper, that's the truth of the matter.

"I know what we'll do. We'll have those hatches off and refresh our eyes with a look at the loot. Get up the gold and the ivory and let's see what sort of a stake we've gambled for."

I e'en did as I was told. He had got us all very submissive by this time.

I'm not a good hand at descriptions, otherwise I might be able to give you some idea of the atmosphere of tense apprehension that reigned aboard the *Kalthumpian*. It was as if she floated everlasting over a submarine volcano that might go off at any minute.

I've been in such a hurry to get on with the yarn that I might have missed out some of the tasty bits—the things that happened when that precious trio found time hanging heavily on their hands and went in for recreation. I've seen Bunting shoot away a sailor's sheath-knife from his belt as he was working on the maintopsail yard; I've seen him set the second mate dancing on the poop by firing at his feet.

They used to set the hands racing up aloft—up for'ard, shin across the mainstays, down the main and up the mizzen, and threaten to shoot the last man home. Once one of the hands gave a bit of lip to Seymour, and he put a bullet clean through his shoulder as quick as ——; and on one or two occasions when they were fractious in their tempers I've heard them debating quite solemnly whether to murder the whole lot of us, bag the ship on their own account and chance the luck of taking her into port short-handed. Oh, yes, you take it from me; they probably put the wind up us all, and I didn't use to be a timorous man.

And on this day in question the atmosphere of uneasiness seemed to be increased. Lyall's temper wasn't as sweet as it sometimes was; he'd had a bickering with Seymour, and one moment I thought it might have come to blows, but they made it up.

But I thought that if seeing the cargo would cheer him up he should see it; anyhow it wasn't for me to object. So I gave the necessary orders.

The gold-dust, of course, was down in my cabin in a safe place; but the tusks were down aft, and I turned the watch to get them up on deck. They made a fine showing as they were carried to the poop and stacked there, and it made my heart sick to think of the sheer waste that was going on.

After all the trouble I'd taken and all the risk I'd run, to have to hand over the whole caboodle, lock, stock and barrel; yes, it was heart-breaking, no less.

Lyall gloated over that ivory. He weighed the tusks in his hands and examined them with the air of an expert.

"Ivory is fetching a big price in South America," he said. "Now that all the natives are making their fortunes and taking up European vices the price of this sort

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of stuff has gone up beyond belief." As if I didn't know!

He insisted on having every single tusk brought up; and by the time it was done it was eight bells, and the other two rolled out on deck. They spent a lot of time examining their haul and calculating what its total value was and discussing how they'd spend the proceeds until I was utterly sick with mortification, and then nothing would please Lyall but that he should go below with me and have another look at the gold-dust, which was all packed neatly in its little frails and made a good enough showing.

"Let's have a drink to celebrate," he said when he'd weighed the frails carefully. "I'm feeling a bit under the weather today, skipper, and my temper isn't all it should be; a drink is just the thing to put matters on a more harmonious footing. Help yourself and pass the bottle."

So I had a drink and he watched me swallow it before he put his own to his lips; then he downed his own and yawned and said he was going to be unsailorly enough to have a calk in the dog-watch, and off he went to the mate's cabin.

TWO days afterward we raised the land, having made a remarkably decent passage. It was during the afternoon watch that we sighted South America, and I believed that we should make our port the following day.

During these two days the pirates had been very cantankerous indeed. Their tempers were like dynamite, going off at the smallest provocation.

I went in mortal terror of my life, never knowing when they'd cut up nasty with me and start a bit of promiscuous shooting. They stopped being civil and were inclined to hector and bully; they took exception to the food and wanted a lot to drink, which wasn't forthcoming because they'd exhausted the ship's supply—never a very large one.

In a way I was glad the trip was so nearly over; even losing the ship and all in her was better than enduring this rotten slavery—for it was slavery when a man was hardly allowed to think his own thoughts.

Up till midnight the ship went along well; but half an hour after I took the deck at midnight the breeze died away to a flat calm. It had been a real scorcher of a day, and with the breeze gone the atmosphere was sultry beyond description.

It was difficult to breathe, and the sense of oppression was appalling. The sails were almost lifeless, except that every now and then they banged and clanked against the masts as the ship rolled slightly in the thin swell that was running from the land.

The air was full of queer, strained noises. The eddies round the rudder gurgled oilily; the rudder itself creaked and thudded; occasionally the faintest whisper of a wind would come and stir the canvas and fill the rigging with a hum as of speed that wasn't there, and then die away in gusty sighs.

Bunting was the pirates' watchman; he had turned out with a thick head, and spent that first half-hour in cursing the ship's dryness. I didn't take much notice of him though; I was pretty well used to his tantrums by that time.

I contented myself by telling him that if he wanted the comfort of a Cunarder he ought to make a point of holding up such a type of craft in the future. He was all for cutting up nasty about that and breathed bowie-knives and slung-shot; but whilst he was in the middle of it up came Lyall, complaining that he wasn't able to sleep.

"That cabin's like a sitz-bath," he said. "And it's alive with fleas, skipper, to say nothing of worse things," he informed me.

Then he turned to Bunting and said:

"There's no need for both of us up here. You go below and finish your nap if you can manage to do it in that hole. I'll stick up here and keep the skipper company."

So down went Bunting, and Lyall and I were left alone save for the man at the wheel. It was a most oppressive night; a regular weather-breeder I named it, neither of us saying much worth repeating.

"Feels to me as if there were some evil demons in the air tonight," the boss pirate remarked after a while. "I'm not a nervous man as a rule, but just lately I've been feeling uncommonly restless. I'll be glad when we make port and get the job over. You can't deny, skipper, it's been a success."

"If you can manage to explain everything to the port authorities it will be a success," I said.

"Oh, I'm certain of them; don't worry. I'm not a man to strike in the dark; and

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the head fellow in this place and I know each other pretty thoroughly."

He went on to tell me quite a lot about how he had got mixed up with this man ashore, and it was interesting; but I noticed once or twice that he seemed to lose the grip of his subject and to wander off into aimless details. Presently he sat down on the skylight and yawned.

"I believe I was rather a fool to let Bunting go below," he said. "I feel sleepy now. But it's no use disturbing him—and tomorrow finishes this game. Once we get this stuff safely ashore I don't know that I care if I never see a revolver again."

As usual, he had a pistol in his hand; his arms were folded but I could see the muzzle of the weapon glinting in the starlight, for though the night was close and trying the stars were shining.

I went on paddling up and down. I was aware of being a bit sleepy myself, and once at the break of the poop I dipped my head into a fire-bucket, because I had never been guilty of the offense of sleeping on watch and thought it late to begin.

Now and then Lyall would speak to me from the skylight, but as the watch went on his remarks became less and less frequent; and presently, so it seemed to me, his whole attitude of tense watchfulness relaxed; his figure collapsed in upon itself.

Then I thought to hear a snore, and you may imagine how my heart began to pump in my breast. The watch-dog was asleep!

At once I began to think out how this fact might be put into account. It was Lyall himself that I was most afraid of; somehow the others had hardly entered into the scheme of things. Lyall was asleep, and—this was our last night at sea! I didn't stop my steady walking, but I kicked off one of my shoes, and walked with one foot bare and the other shod, just to see if he would observe any difference in my footfalls. He seemed to take no notice. Presently I kicked off the other shoe.

I hadn't got a clear working plan in my mind, mark you; but the thought was there—that this was the last chance I'd have to win freedom. And all the black and bitter thoughts that I'd been victim to during the days and weeks surged up and filled me with hatred for that fellow Lyall. You command a ship and find yourself compelled to take orders from a chancecomer like Lyall and then you'll understand my feelings.

I began to sing in a low voice; I broke off, and there came another gentle snore from Lyall's nose. He was asleep. I could see the revolver still lying in the crook of his elbow, and that caused me to hesitate, but then it struck me that it was worth trying, though if I failed, if he were only playing 'possum to lure me into a demonstration, my jig was certainly up.

I had a knife in my pocket and the signal halyards aft were belayed to windward; still without any clear plan in my head I went along and quickly cut off a good length of the cordage. Then I went to look at the compass and cast a glance at the helmsman. It was Carruthers, a good man, the one who'd had a bullet put through his palm at the beginning of the show.

"Are you game to try to save the ship?" I asked him in a low voice. "That fellow's asleep, and there's just a chance."

"Try me, sir," he whispered. "The beggars shot me, and I'm not one that forgets easily."

"Got your boots on?" I asked.

No, he was barefooted; it was a warm night, and he had no need of shoes. There wasn't an opportunity to work up a scheme of action; at any moment Lyall might waken and our chance would be gone.

"COME on then!" I said; and with no more of a war-council than that we tiptoed to where Lyall sat on the skylight.

And the whole thing was done and finished with before I'd time to think really what I was doing. Astonishing, eh? I must have subconsciously planned such an affair beforehand, and the subconscious side of my brain was working then.

Carruthers and I went to work as if we'd rehearsed the business a score of times. I grabbed that pistol and tweaked it clear, with my thumb between the cocked hammer and the cylinder in case it went off; Carruthers clapped one hand over the man's mouth and another to his throat, with an arm over his shoulder and his weight on his back, all crumpling him up, and before you could say, "knife!" I slipped the bight of the signal halyards round the back of his neck and his knees, took a turn and hauled tight, and there we had him trussed like a fowl ready for the spit.

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I don't think I'd have minded strangling him; if he'd fought I'd have done it. But Carruthers weighed about a ton; and his hand had the grip of a vice. I took half a dozen turns with the signal-halyard stuff to make sure; then I whipped a wooden belaying-pin out of the rail and crowded it between Lyall's teeth, lashed it well in place, and straightened up. There hadn't been a sound all the time, observe.

I felt a different man. I'd got a pistol for a start; and a quick search of our prisoner's clothing gave me another—two .455's loaded in every chamber; and though I didn't profess to be a Bisley prize-winner, yet it's astonishing what a comfort a pistol can be.

I don't think I'd have cared much if the other two rapscallions had come on deck just then; I'd clean lost that appalling feeling of helplessness. If they started shooting I could shoot back; I'd called their bluff and held the joker.

It was no use running unncessary risks; so we went about our job as quietly as we possibly could. We lashed Lyall to the skylight like a mummy on its bier, and then the two of us held a quick council.

It wouldn't do to bring the rest of the hands into the mess yet a while because that would certainly have caused shooting, and for certain reasons that were at the back of my mind I was rather wishful for the three pirates to go on living a bit longer. Carruthers was of the opinion, however, that we could tackle the job by ourselves, and we proceeded to do it.

I gave him one of the pistols, with instructions not on any account to use it unless he found himself dead up against it; and then I sacrificed more of the signal halyards to the good cause.

I went quietly below to my cabin and got two of my blankets; these I took on deck and we dipped them in the fire-buckets until they were thoroughly sodden. It seemed to me that a lot depended on our first attack, and a wetted blanket is a useful accessory in the work we had on hand.

We wrung them out so that the dripping of the loose water wouldn't cause any unnecessary noise; stowed the pistols where we could get at them one-time; and then, being prepared, went very softly down to the quarter-deck.

The ship was still becalmed, and the fact that the wheel was deserted didn't matter much; but just by way of showing you how trifling matters crop up in the midst of bigger events I took a turn round the wheel spokes and the grating with the end of the spanker-boom sheet, just in case a breeze came whilst we were busy and caught the ship in irons.

We made no noise as we walked to the door of the mate's cabin. They always kept that door open, you'll remember, in case of a surprize, and this night was the same as usual.

They didn't even draw the curtain over the doorway, lest it might trip them as they came out; indeed, they'd taken it down altogether, because on one of their practise stunts Seymour had fouled it and fallen his entire length on the deck outside.

Everything was as dark as the grave inside, but I knew the hang of the room pretty well. The two bunks faced the door, and there would be a man in each, as there was no settee big enough to hold a man comfortably. They'd arranged it so that the man relieved from watching on deck turned into the bunk vacated by the man relieving, so they never slept through a whole night in the same bunk.

We listened; both men were sleeping heavily. I heard Bunting mutter cursefully; I heard him stir and scratch himself, and I prayed then harder than I do most times that no enterprising flea would happen along to wreck our plan at the outset. We waited until everything was quiet again; then I stepped like a shadow over the sill of the door and stood within the room.

"What is it?" asked Bunting.

He waked quickly; before he could say a word more I dropped my saturated blanket on his face and crammed the muzzle of Lyall's revolver against his throat. I stepped aside as I did, and Carruthers jumped like a cat from the doorway into the lower bunk, clean on top of Seymour.

It must have been that pain he had suffered from his shot hand was rankling in his mind, because I heard a squelching sort of a thud and another, like a big fist in a man's face; then there was a nasty choking kind of sound, and Carruthers said—

"I've got him, sir—the swab!"

"If you move an eyelash," said I to Bunting, "I'll blow your throat out."

He was too bewildered to do anything but gasp and choke. I'd put a good deal

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of weight on that folded blanket, and he was nearly a goner when I released him. I didn't do that until I'd disarmed him.

How did I do it, considering both my arms were occupied? I'll tell you. I vaulted into the bunk on top of him and knelt on his blanketed face, whilst I searched about for his weapons; and what with my weight and the thrust of the pistol in his throat he didn't try to prevent me.

Once he was disarmed I didn't care overmuch. Carruthers was busily at work; what he did was to wrap his man up in the wet blanket and lace him up with a length of signal-halyard stuff until he looked like a Navy man's hammock nicley stowed, and lay like a log.

I tied up my man too pretty securely; and then we went outside, shut the door on them and shook hands with one another as solemnly as could be, though those hands were simply chock full of pistols.

It was very funny to realize that the ship was free again; very funny. At first I couldn't tumble to it; I expected to hear one or other of the pirates make a noise.

But everything was just the same as it had been before; the ship was rolling slowly, the yards were creaking and the sails were thudding; there were the same gurgles from the eddies about the rudder. And the ship was my own again!

I gloated on that fact, and then I determined to make all things secure. First I got the watch aft and told them what had happened; and they gave us a cheer.

Then we paid attention to Lyall, and trussed him up in such fashion that he wouldn't get apoplexy. Next we singled out the other two and made it possible for them to go on living, though they didn't particularly deserve it.

Then the second mate came on deck and I told him what had come about, handed over the prisoners to his charge and went below. I slept like a top until the steward called me at seven bells, and at first I couldn't bring myself to remember what had happened. Then it all came back.

I listened, and there was a good fresh breeze blowing, and I felt my heart grow glad within me. I'd told the second mate that if a breeze came up he was to shape a course for our original port—we weren't so very far away from it as all that—and I tell you, the hum of the wind past my port, the gurgle of the water outboard, the drone of the canvas and the play of the ship made me feel like a boy just going home on holiday.

I ate a most tremendous breakfast after I'd bathed and shaved—yes, I even had a shave in honor of the occasion—and then I went on deck. Lyall was staring at me when I showed myself; he was still bound. I had stuck one of his pistols in my belt, and I touched the butt of it as his eyes met mine.

"YOU don't seem very comfortable," I said. "We'll make things easier for you."

And I told the second mate to cast him adrift. As soon as the last turn was removed and he was free, what does he do but stumble to the wheel-grating, sit down and go off dead asleep.

"He's been like that all the watch," the second mate said. "Doesn't seem to care a hang about anything. What are you going to do about it, sir?"

"I'm going to get rid of the whole boiling of 'em," I said. "And as quickly as it can be done. Get the hands aft and lower out the dingey. Tell the steward to put in three days' provisions and water."

"Not going to take 'em into port to stand their trial, sir?" the second mate asked. "They've done murder."

I told him to get busy about his job and not argue. The dingey was outboard and all was ready. I told the hands to carry the three pirates to the boat and this was done. Then I hove the ship to to stop her way, because she was doing a brisk six knots and not making any fuss about it.

After that I stood on the rail and looked down into the boat. Lyall was awake; so were the others. They were shivering, and Seymour of a sudden was violently sick.

"I suppose," I said, "that I ought to take you into port and hand you over to justice, but I'm not going to do it. You came aboard here in about as dirty a fashion as you well could come. You relied on the sailor's instinct of pity, and you took advantage of it. You committed murder, and you'd killed the lot of us if need demanded it.

"You're going off much as you came aboard. I've got your pistols, but you've got something in return for them.

"You came aboard here and thought you

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were more than human—as big as God, in fact. Well, that's as may be.

"But here's something to comfort you whilst you're working your way to the shore. The mate died of sleeping sickness, and—you've got it in that boat with you.

"We carried more than gold-dust and ivory in this ship; we carried death. Bite on that."

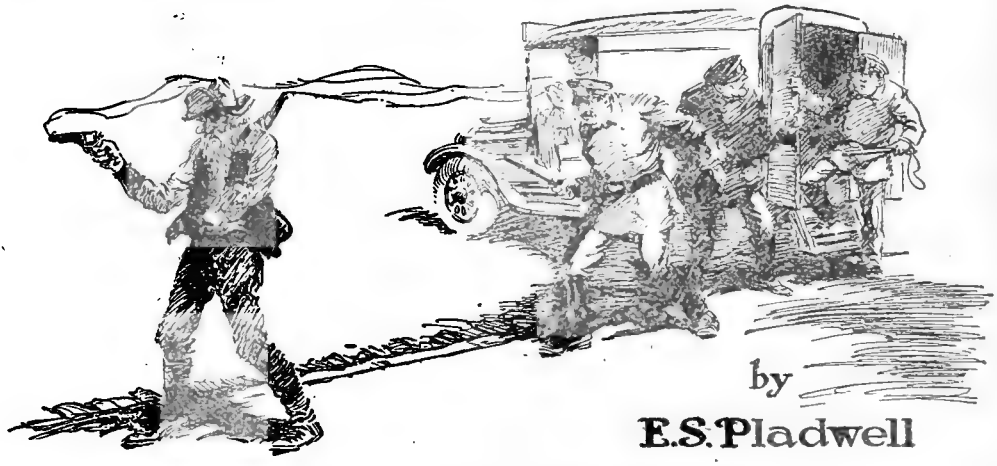
Then I ordered the crew to lower away; the tackles were shaken clear; the main-yard was filled, and we stood off on our course.

I looked at the boat through the glasses as it drifted astern. Lyall was staring listlessly at me, his eyes wide open and his jaw dropped.

I saw hell in his face. Then as I watched his head dropped forward on his chest. The other two men were already asleep. Talk about Fate!

What became of them? I don't know. Never heard a cheep. But I expect they died—slowly. I made a good profit out of the voyage, though—more than they did. Will you have a drink?

The TROUBLE-SHOOTER



by

E.S. Pladwell

Author of "Highly Civilized," "A Teacher of Etiquette," etc.

THE patrol-wagon rolled up to police headquarters and stopped with a flourish. Four panting policemen dragged a belligerent old desert-rat out of the wagon and rushed him into the station. The burly chief of police met them at the door and stopped the procession.

"It's no use," he growled. "I'll talk to him alone. Here, give me his pistols."

An eager minion recited the circumstances in the case, pointing out every felonious detail. The chief knew it already. He shook his head sadly and then beckoned the old miscreant into his office for a very pointed interview.

"The trouble is you're wild!" exclaimed the chief, starting to pace up and down behind his rail. "You have as much business in a civilized community as Sitting Bull! Hang it all, can't you learn to control yourself? Shooting up the town and all that Wild West business is over with. Gila City's an orderly community. You've got to get that into your head!"

Old "Bull" Judson, frontiersman and ex-bandit, stroked his Santa Claus beard and swayed uncertainly in his dusty boots while his glaring right eye—his only one—looked embarrassed.

"I didn't shoot that there conductor jest now," he mumbled.

"No. You just turned him inside out. You don't know how strong you are."

"He said my transfer was no good."

"Well? Did that give you any license to take the trolley car to pieces and hit him with it?"

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"I didn't! It was only some of the seats! He'd called me a liar and I guess I lost my temper."

"I guess you did! They turned in a riot call and some of the passengers are running yet."

The chief glanced at the ancient .45's taken from the old incorrigible.

"What was your idea in shooting up that delivery-truck driver yesterday? Are you trying to get arrested every day?"

"That truck-driver pretty near run me down. I shot past his head to give the darned fool a lesson in turning corners proper."

"And sprayed bullets down Main Street in the middle of the traffic," concluded the chief. "You aimed to scare one truck-driver and you scared the whole city!"

"Didn't hurt nobody."

"No—nothing human, that is. A lady tourist was leading a lap-dog by a string at the depot four blocks away and one of your .45 slugs came down and spread that pup along six railroad tracks. There's nothing left of that thousand-dollar mutt except a piece of string and a lawsuit against the city."

"I didn't know that."

"No. You never thought of it. That's just the trouble. You just don't think. You have no more understanding of civilization than a wildcat!"

The chief threw up his hands.

"Go back to your dime novel. Go back among the shades of the past—back with 'Kit' Carson and 'Billy the Kid' and the buffaloes. You're out of date—you don't belong here!"

There was a startled, hurt look in the belligerent gray eye of the old frontiersman and the chief felt sorry immediately.

"Excuse me, Bull," he apologized; "my nerves are on edge. Indigestion I guess. You see, here in Gila City we're right alongside the desert where some old-timer like you is liable to pull a Rip Van Winkle and stand the town on its head. It's a strain on the police. It makes all sorts of complications. Right now for instance I'm trying to sidestep a movement to have you run out of town."

"Who? Me?"

The old gun-fighter who had shot Gila City to smithereens in its younger days stiffened to his full six feet. His outraged soul showed in his blazing eye.

"Me? Run me out of town? Heh—I guess I'll have somethin' to say about that!"

"And a lot of others," sighed the chief. "That's what makes it so hard. You're too darned eminent. You're the last of the old Arizona bad-men. Tourists stop over at Gila just to look at you. The hotels don't care any more for you than they do for their cash-registers—and still I'm supposed to run you out of town."

"Cash-registers?" groped the old hermit from the mountains.

"Why, sure. You're a commercial asset to the city. You used to lead the Judson gang, didn't you? Used to rob trains, hold up stages, shoot up towns, dodge posses and raise Cain generally, didn't you? Well, haven't they written you up in the Sunday supplements? Doesn't the chamber of commerce invite you to all its banquets? What do you suppose they do it for—just because of your elegant manners? Not on your life! You're one of the official landmarks of the town."

"Well, I'm durned," mumbled the old sinner, stupefied by his own greatness.

"Sure. You're the town pet and the town pest. You're Bull Judson, Arizona's worst citizen. You're an echo from the romantic past, as the tourists all say. But look what I'm up against. I'm supposed to enforce the law. I don't mind your getting illuminated or gambling or swearing or licking citizens you don't like. I make allowances. You're a privileged character. But when it comes to shooting .45 slugs through the down-town traffic or blocking the car lines for an hour—well, it's a little too much. Pressure has been brought to bear on me and I've either got to defy the pressure, run you out of town or resign."

A certain outraged traction corporation with immense political and financial power had given its terse ultimatum: Judson must go.

The old villain in the frayed clothes and dusty boots looked pensive.

"Heh," he remarked at length, "if anybody's got any kick why don't they come see me?"

"They don't have to. The traction company simply sent me a note signed by President C. Ellinwood Blount. That's all there was to it."

"Mabbe I'd better see Blount," suggested the old wolf. "Durned stuck-up fat dude—I can handle him!"

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"S-say—what do you think this town is? A free rough-house? Can't you learn? Do you think I want a twenty-million-dollar plutocrat smeared all over his office? Where would my job be? Hang it all——!"

THERE was an interruption. The door opened and in glided a tall, thin, red-faced, sandy-mustached person in immaculate tweeds who looked like some gaunt Kitchener. He bore a cane, a pair of shrieking yellow gloves and a bored manner that marked his aristocratic English caste. The chief bowed with immense respect. The newcomer was Sir William St. Vincent, fifteenth Duke of Chamberford and head of a great British syndicate which had recently merged two big ranches into one superranch that promised to be the finest thing of its kind in Arizona.

"I say," greeted his lordship, coming up to the rail, "there is going to be a bit of a riot up at my rawnch. I wish you'd look into it."

"What? Again?" snorted the chief.

"Quite so. Old feud, you know. Inherited from previous owners, you might say. Beastly nuisance. If you'd send out some of your men to knock their silly heads together you'd do a good bit of work, what?"

The chief had a mental picture of his meager force trying it and he smiled wanly before proceeding to pass the buck, as he was legally justified in doing.

"If the Three Bar K and Esmeralda outfits get to scrapping it's not up to me," demurred the chief. "Your ranch is outside the Gila City limits, isn't it?"

"Quite so. Just outside."

The chief waved his hand.

"That's it. Outside my jurisdiction. I can only act within the city limits. Go see the sheriff of the county."

"But—I say—the sheriff is out of town."

"Well, see his chief deputy."

"The deputies are out in the hills with rifles, potting some person who broke the Arizona prohibition laws. I understand he had failed to provide for a rake-off, whatever that is."

"Glory!" sighed the chief irritably.

The chief's embarrassed gaze wandered from the busy down-town traffic outside to where old Bull Judson was standing, hat in hand, ready to take up the previous matter when his lordship was finished. Judson was muttering to himself.

"Well, what do you think of it?" demanded the chief.

"Who? Me?" The old wolf's bilious eye glared at his lordship scornfully. "Heh! Sounds like a passel of durned foolishness! If them ranch-hands raises ructions fire 'em!"

"But I say!" protested his lordship. "When we bought the rawnches we bound ourselves to take care of the men. Besides, they're good cattle-rustlers."

"Which?" gurgled the scandalized old villain.

"Cattle-handlers—cattle-persons—cattlemen," snapped his lordship, ignorant of his linguistic error.

"Oh. Heh! Now I know why there's trouble on the ranch."

"Whoa!" interposed the chief of police. "You've got it wrong, Bull. The trouble's deeper than that. This feud's been running about ten years. Eight years ago they mixed at Hawkins Springs and had it out at twenty yards—eight killed and three wounded. The owners patched it up later but it didn't last. It's a foreman's war. A few months ago Corbett, the foreman of the Esmeralda, bought a new Winston car and after that the Three Bar K gang kept the Gila City highway paved with glass and scrap-iron. That's the sort of thing the duke here has to contend with."

"Quite so," nodded his lordship.

Judson looked interested. The old bandit might be slow in understanding corporation politics or cash-registers but here he was in his element.

"Well," he suggested thoughtfully, "why don't you have them two foremen meet and git it out of their systems?"

His lordship looked regretful.

"Corbett of the Esmeralda is four feet six; Boyd of the Three Bar K is six feet four. Besides, Boyd has some reputation as an—er—two-firearm person."

"A which?"

"A two-gun man," translated the chief.

Old Judson looked even more interested. He had some little reputation in that line himself but his scorn of this Englishman made him refrain from comment. The chief saw it and placed a hand on Judson's shoulder.

"The duke's not a ranchman and doesn't pretend to be," explained the chief. "The duke's the head of a big English syndicate that makes investments all over the world

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—ranches, oil-wells, grain-elevators, steamship-lines, or anything else. He doesn't do any superintending. He hires and fires superintendents by the carload. He's just sticking around Gila City till he can find the right man to handle his ranch. When he finds the man he puts him in charge and lights out for Norway or North Dakota and does it all over again with some other big proposition. Get the idea?"

Judson began to get some glimmering of the Englishman's size. He looked at this exquisitely groomed figure with more respect. Meanwhile the chief was germinating a brilliant idea:

JUDSON had to leave town. The chief had to drive him out or certain political powers would make his job uncomfortable. On the other hand, the chief dared not drive Judson out because the old miscreant was too popular with the hotel, restaurant, tourist and rubberneck-wagon interests—also the newspapers. But if the old reprobate were to take a voluntary position on Sir William's new ranch——

It looked impossible. This hopeless old ragamuffin with one eye seemed no candidate to run a modern ranch; and yet if this stern, two fisted, irascible, valiant relic of the old fighting West couldn't handle those ranch-hands, nobody could. His reputation was the most terrible in Arizona. He had tamed Apaches, stage-messengers, sheriffs and rival bad-men. Though old he was strong as a bull. Furthermore he knew every kink in the average Westerner's mind.

It was true that the bellicose old ruffian might break loose and start some catastrophe worse than the existing one, but that was just a chance and anyhow it would be outside the chief's jurisdiction. The chief had to consider his own position. Here was a way to be well rid of the whole business. The more the chief thought of the idea, the more he admired its stately wisdom.

"Judson," he inquired, "why don't you look into this shindy up at the duke's ranch?"

"Who, me?"

"My word!" exclaimed his lordship.

"Sure! Why not? Duke, you've heard about Judson I suppose? Sure. Every one has. Maybe if he took hold of your case he'd cure the trouble in no time. Think it over. He may be just the man you want. He knows those fellows like a book."

Sir William's cool business eye looked dubious.

"I'd like to have a manager," he commented slowly.

The chief was desperately anxious to sell his idea and get rid of his hopeless problem. He refused to be held off.

"Oh, this old wildcat isn't any manager. He's just a trouble-shooter for an emergency case. Put him in as temporary manager till you find the expert you're looking for. By that time you'll probably have peace. I'll guarantee the goods, duke. Bull Judson can tame anybody in Arizona. Besides, things can't be any worse than they are, can they?"

"It looks like a sporting chawnce," conceded his lordship. "Still if it were bruited about that I had employed an official fighter——"

"You've got forty or fifty now. One more won't hurt," argued the eager chief. "Besides, Judson would have authority as manager."

His lordship, still unconvinced, turned to Judson. "Have you ever run a rawnch?" he demanded. "Have you ever done any rawnch work?"

"He never worked in his life!" snorted the chief. "He never had to. I tell you this old citizen is a prize manhandler. Give him a chance!"

The incongruity of a chief of police's trying to farm out the services of an assault-and-battery expert never struck either of them. Each was thinking of other problems.

"Well—er—this is an unusual case, perhaps," mused his lordship, still looking at Judson. "If you can handle the matter how much—er—compensation would you desire? I'm willing to pay well for results, my man, but not for experiments."

The old villain's ears were burning and his temper had reached the boiling-point. His services were being offered for sale as if he were a slave on the market.

"Who in —— said I was goin' to your —— ranch?" he roared. "Who gave you two any —— license to hire me out? Heh? I want to know! I reckon I've got somethin' to say about where I'll go! You take your —— ranch and go to —— with it!"

It came like a shot from a cannon.

"My word!" exclaimed his lordship.

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"That goes!" thundered the old battler truculently.

"But—I say—wait a moment! D'ye know I'm jolly well inclined to think you're the sort of violent person I need."

"What?"

"Quite so. If you give an exhibition of temper like that in front of my rawnch-hands I'm inclined to think you might frighten them, what?"

The old frontiersman came close to apoplexy. In all his sixty-three years of violent domination he had never met anything like this.

Strong men had quailed before his glance. Burly fighters had been overawed by his ferocious rage and now a dude Englishman held him at bay and seemed bored in the bargain.

Suddenly old Judson's terrible eye contracted and his right hand went down toward his hip. The chief gurgled and made for the rail to head him off.

"You don't appear to understand what I'm sayin'," remarked the old bandit in a smooth, silky voice. "Or mebbe you're aimin' to make fun of me."

His lordship never blinked, even though he at last understood the sort of man he was dealing with. This stern, untamable old killer could be handled with only one thing —that was tact.

"Neither," answered his lordship slowly. "I will put it in different language." He placed a hand on Judson's shoulder, which tensed. "I need your help, old top. Maybe you and I can solve this problem. Come out to the rawnch and help me work this thing out—be my guest for a time. I'd be delighted. Will you?"

"Oh," said Judson uncertainly. "That's quite different."

THE Englishman began to use his persuasive powers and thus it was that, five minutes later, a natty British duke and a highly disreputable old desert rat walked arm in arm to an expensive limousine outside the chief's office while the chief, with his troubles smoothed away, lit a cigar and congratulated Gila City on having a remarkably clever head to its police department.

The chief's satisfaction lasted two weeks; then Sir William arrived again.

"I say," announced his lordship, "d'ye remember that old pistol-person I took to my rawnch? I believed he was going to tame the rougher element."

"What's he done?"

"Nothing."

"Oh, well, give him time."

"But that's not it, you know. He's keeping up the ill-feeling between the two sets of men. I don't mind giving him time, but this is a bit thick."

"Holy smoke!"

"He has also undone the work of myself and my predecessors. The owners of the Esmeralda and Three Bar K rawnches tried for years to keep the silly feud from coming to the surface. So did I. And now this old desperado of yours has started fanning the flames again. He seems to be a leader of both parties."

"Well, if he's done that in two weeks he's a corker!"

"Yes, but that's because he appeals to their low instincts, you know. They think he's a jolly old hero. He swaggers about and talks of his pawst reputation while the silly awsses follow him around like sheep. He tells each crowd what a beastly lot the other crowd is—incites 'em to murder and arson. Then he holds 'em off. I say, what sort of a dizzy party is this?"

"It's all news to me. Do the men of the Esmeralda know he's also playing with the Three Bar K?"

"Oh, no, he's keeping them apart."

The chief looked puzzled. "How do you and this old hellion get along?"

"Quite well. But what in the world is he trying to do with my rawnch?"

"I dunno. It's all outside my jurisdiction but maybe I'll go over tomorrow and find out."

THE chief did so. He arrived in a flivver at mid-afternoon, made his perilous way amid concrete forms and foundation-piers of new ranch buildings and found the old sinner smoking an expensive cigar on the porch of Sir William's temporary residence.

"What's your big idea?" quizzed the chief after the formalities.

"Idee? Why, durn it, didn't you ask me to straighten out this trouble between the two ranches?"

"Yes, but what are you doing about it?"

"Who? Me? I'm doin' development work."

"Developing bad tempers?"

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The old scoundrel showed something like a grim smile.

"Sure. I found this here ruction too big for one man to put down by force, so I'm doin' some agitatin'."

He noted the alarmed face of the chief and explained:

"What do you do with cattle when you're sendin' 'em to the slaughter-house? Heh? You fatten 'em, don't you? Well, same here. I'm aimin' to fatten these ranch-hands for the slaughter. They're goin' to be peaceful."

The chief was on his feet.

"What? Lay off! What do you mean, slaughter? Are you crazy? Quit the job! Quit quick! Holy smoke, it's outside my jurisdiction but I'm responsible just the same! Do you think I'm going to stand by while you incite these men to kill each other?"

"Kill!" snorted the old frontiersman contemptuously. "Who said they was goin' to kill any one? Heh? The real fighters was killed eight years ago. The rest of 'em puts tacks on the road and thinks they're raisin' ——! These fellers ain't no gun-fighters. They're jest a lot of tough ranch-hands with a grouch. Kill? Heh! We're goin' to run a Sunday-school!"

"Well," asked the mollified chief, "how are you going to do it?"

"I'm goin' to convert 'em," responded the old blackguard and that was all the satisfaction the chief received.

ONE week later the mails brought the chief a missive, beautifully engraved, announcing that Miss Darling Lovie, the noted motion-picture star, would be delighted to give a short talk, in costume, to the gentlemen of the Esmeralda ranch. She was seeking the real Arizona local color, she explained. The event was to be held next evening in the new concrete garage of the big ranch syndicate.

The chief refused to believe it.

"It looks crazy!" he snorted. "What sort of doings is that for a big cattle ranch? What's this fool movie doll traveling from Los Angeles to meet a lot of bum ranch-hands for?"

The chief's eye caught a postscript done in the scholarly hand of Sir William:

I am beginning to understand this elderly desperado's idea. A charming time will be enjoyed by all. Please do not attend. It might spoil things.

The chief rang a bell sharply. A sharp-eyed, medium-sized detective appeared.

"Casey, take this invitation and get into the show at the big ranch tomorrow night. This is a special job—outside the city limits. I can't go myself but I want some information. When the show's over come right back and tell me what happened. I'll wait here for your report."

NEXT night the chief went to his office at the proper time, but the detective failed to appear. An hour passed—another—still another. The chief began to get anxious. At last he started to prepare a rescue expedition.

Suddenly the door opened and in lurched a shattered wreck whose clothes hung about him in streamers. His hair was tousled, his lips were bruised and his agonized, reproachful eyes were blackened frightfully. His face was entirely disorganized.

"Casey!" roared the chief.

The sleuth slumped into a chair and drew a long breath, gulping maledictions. The chief bent over him.

"You look as if a steam-roller had hit you. Hurt bad?"

The sleuth's teeth bared in a snarl.

"Huh!" he growled balefully. "Next time you send me out to that ranch—send somebody else instead."

"What happened? Wouldn't they let you in?"

"Oh yes, sure; they let me in all right!"

"Well? What happened?"

"They wouldn't let me out."

"Who wouldn't?"

"Both sides."

"Both sides? Why—what sort of a festival was this? Where was the movie actress?"

"Movie actress? Quit kidding!"

The chief passed a hand over his puzzled brow. "S-say!" he roared. "Start at the beginning and tell me what this was all about!"

"Peace and good will," muttered the detective.

"Yes, you look it."

"Well, I didn't think each side would think I belonged to the other side. I got it both ways."

"Start at the beginning."

"Um. Well, there wasn't any actress. That was just the bait. It was used to get the Esmeralda men into the concrete garage."

"Go on."

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"The garage was all lit up. The back end looked like a stage—flowers and things. The duke's valley led us into a storeroom to brush up and leave hats and coats."

"Yes—yes."

"One fellow had a gun but the valley said it wasn't proper to meet a lady dressed that way, so the valley got away with the gun. Then he locked the door on us."

"Go on."

"Pretty soon the door opened and we rushed out—right plum into a crowd of Three Bar K men coming out of another storeroom. They'd got the same kind of invitations we did, only they were told to come a little later by another door. My head aches."

"Did they fight?"

"Not then. Old Judson came on the stage followed by the duke. Judson started to speak but somebody booed. That got his temper up so he stepped into the crowd and knocked the man down. Then he pulled a gun and made an official speech."

"A speech? What about?"

"About peace. The old blister said he was going to spread peace around that ranch if he had to hold a funeral for the whole mob. He used a lot of swear words. He said this here county was getting sick of them two gangs bickerin', so now they was goin' to get it out of their systems once and for all. He said he'd put 'em in fighting trim, so now they were goin' to fight for law and order if they had to stay there all week. He said a lot of other stuff. He held that gun all the time. He had 'em buffaloed."

"Well?"

The sleuth sighed.

"The doors were locked and there was no way out and Judson wouldn't listen to reason," he concluded tiredly. "Finally they had to fight. I tried to keep out of it but some fellow hit me a clip on the jaw and then everybody piled on. Look at me!"

"I've been looking. How long did it last?"

"Until I'd kissed a lot of ranch-hands."

"What?" shrieked the chief.

"Yeh. Judson wouldn't let 'em quit. Kept yellin' for more pep. Finally everybody was all in, so the old devil ordered 'em to shake hands and quit fightin' for good. Otherwise he'd keep 'em there to fight by relays."

"And they did it?"

"Oh, they fought a little longer but it didn't do 'em any good, so then they tried to mob Judson. By that time Judson and the duke had shinned up to a loft and taken the ladder with 'em. The men got so sore at Judson and the duke that they forgot their differences and held an indignation meeting. Later on, when everybody was about finished, the duke made a speech from the loft. Told 'em to shake hands and forget it. After a while they did."

"Well? How about you?"

"Why, during the fight I'd tried to show my police badge but I didn't have a chance. After things had cooled down I showed my badge to Judson. The —— old skunk said it was outside my jurisdiction! Then the duke chimed in and asked what I meant by this unwarranted assault upon all his employees at once. That brought a laugh. A laugh! —— —— ——!

"Quit it!" commanded the chief. "What happened next?"

"Judson said I ought to apologize. Me, mind you! He said he never liked them police people anyhow, except the chief, so I ought to square myself for jumpin' them innocent ranch-hands. That brought another laugh. They all begun to feel good, so they held a reunion with me as the goat."

"Holy smoke!" exclaimed the chief. "Then the trouble's all over up at the big ranch. Good! That's the best news we've heard in many a day!"

The sleuth, however, was not so optimistic. He arose with painful dignity.

"I done a special job for you tonight, chief," he announced reproachfully. "It wasn't in my regular line of duty but I done it. If I thought you'd framed up on me——"

The sleuth looked at his superior with an ominous expression.

"Nothing like that," demurred the chief slowly. "If I'd wanted to get you I'd have tried some other way. This was an accident."

"Well, I won't resign tonight," said the sleuth pointedly. "I'll think it over."

"Sure. Go ahead. You'll feel better tomorrow. Besides, you're in line for a sergeantcy. Think it over."

The detective finally went home to think.

THE chief felt a warm glow of self-satisfaction. The results of his shrewd plan had more than justified the method and the chief appreciated himself accordingly. His satisfaction lasted

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till next morning when his lordship appeared seeming rather distraught.

"I say," announced his lordship somberly. "I came to speak about that elderly ruffian I took on my rawnch."

"Yes? What's he doing?"

"Doing? My word, he's done it!"

"What?"

"Committed assault upon one of the most prominent stockholders of our corporation!"

"When?"

"A few hours ago. I have the patient resting at my rawnch-house."

"Go on," mumbled the chief tiredly; "we might as well hear the worst. Shoot!"

"Shoot? —— me, I'd like to!" His lordship tapped the chief's rail irritably with his cane. "I say, you recommended this old desperado, didn't you? Now look at the bally mess!"

"Well, what's the matter?" snapped the chief. "He did what I promised, didn't he?"

"More, old thing, much more."

"Start at the beginning," suggested the chief.

"Why, it's rawther mixed. The old desperado conducted a—er—missionary meeting in the garage yesterday evening to make my employees see the light. He spoke of peace and cooperation and all that sort of thing. Made a jolly strong impression. Labored and struggled no end with 'em. When he finished every one of 'em was converted. Meek as lambs. Most remarkable, what?"

"Go on."

"That made me feel top-hole. Grateful, you know. I opened some fine old Scotch and we had a bit of a celebration. Then I went to bed. Judson stayed up and celebrated some more."

"Of course. He tore right into it. That old barbarian has no more manners than a sky-rocket."

"Quite so. This morning his temper was beastly. Just as we were finishing breakfast a limousine rolled up and out popped one of our most distinguished local stockholders, Mr. C. Ellinwood Blount, president of your Gila City Traction Company, civic leader and all that sort of thing."

The chief began to see the light. Something started to gurgle in his throat.

"Go on," he choked.

"Mr. Blount came up the steps and this impossible old creature of yours went down and met him. He wanted to know what Blount was doing there. Impudent, what? It was my rawnch, you know."

"Go on."

"I interceded. I explained that Mr. Blount was one of our most important stockholders. That seemed to get the old savage's wind up. Most ferocious. He said he was tricked. He said if he'd known that Blount was connected with the project he wouldn't have come. Silly awss! What difference did that make?"

"Search me," said the chief innocently. "What happened then?"

"Why—er—nothing to mention in public. It wouldn't do to let the reporters hear of it, you know. Judson announced that he was going to clean Mr. Blount and then he made Blount extremely dirty. Queer language you Americans have, what?"

"Where's Judson?" demanded the chief.

"Oh, he's left. Shook the dust of the rawnch off his boots. He said he was going back to the mountains. He said the city people have low ethical standards—or words to that effect. His language was impossible. But what is this silly business all about? Why did he assault Mr. Blount? Does the law allow that sort of thing? It's an outrage! Something ought to be done!"

The chief saw a mental picture of the arrogant C. Ellinwood Blount rolling in the dirt but he exercised self-control. The chief had taken much humiliation from this powerful magnate, but the chief was a politician first, last and always.

"It's terrible!" he agreed soberly. "Awful! It's an unwarranted attack on one of the most prominent citizens of Gila City! It's an unjustifiable assault upon the dignity of a noble and worthy citizen! It's a piece of criminal impudence that can not be condoned! The man that did it should be thoroughly punished. But——"

The chief's voice trembled a little.

"It's all outside my jurisdiction, you know."

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WULFHERE

A. B. HIGGINSON

A Five-Part Story

PART IV

CHAPTER XXV

HOW EDBERT FINDS WULFHERE AGAIN

ON THE morrow we discerned a pleasant town lying in the valley some five miles away. We met a traveling merchant and his company who informed us it was the town of Whichford.

"The regent of the kingdom is now there," he said, "and with him a regiment of the king's infantry. They are on the way to join Earl Brian and his men at Chestertown where a battle will be fought ere long with Edwin of Northumbria."

"Where then is Great Sword the King?" I asked. "Is he not in Worcester? I bear a message to him from the King of Mercia."

"But Great Sword is not King of Hwicce," he replied. "The king's name is Eanfrith."

Now this surprized me and I asked him to explain, for I said I had heard Great Sword had won the kingdom because he had slain Wiglaf.

" 'Tis true," he said, "that Great Sword slew the king that was, and slew him in fair fight. The kingdom indeed was his by right, but strange as it may seem to thee he would have none of it. Eanhere's it was he said, and he would not rob his blood-brother of his throne. But Eanhere was not acceptable to the lords, for he was the son of Cuthwine the Saxon, whom they hated, and also he had slain two of their greatest lords. Eanfrith was chosen king, with Great Sword regent."

"But Eanfrith was brother to Eanhere, thou sayest; he was then son to Cuthwine also?"

"That is quite true," the merchant said, "but he was but an infant when Cuthwine the Saxon was slain. Then he had been adopted into Brian's family, who made him more a Briton than a Saxon. He was but fifteen years of age when he was crowned, and universally beloved. Eanhere his brother was the first to support his claim, and Great Sword was content. 'Tis Great Sword though who really rules in Hwicce."

"It is to Great Sword that my message is," I answered; "we will then on to Whichford."

We thanked the merchant and set out once more. It was an hour after noon when we entered the town. It was small but its streets were wide and clean, and its people prosperous-looking. The place was thronged with men who had come in from all sides to see Great Sword and his blood-brother Eanhere, and their regiment. They looked at us with some suspicion as we marched up the street.

The name of Penda the Terrible had carried far, and the Hwiccans quite expected that before long the Mercian would pay them an unwelcome visit. It was rumored even then that Penda might join with Edwin against Cadwallo. I heard the names of Great Sword and Blood Ax on every mouth as we passed up. It seemed that these two were held in high esteem by the people of that town.

"Ha, but he is a fine one, this Great Sword!" said one. "He has not his match in England."

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"No, nor Blood Ax either," said another. "These two together could vanquish any four in the land."

"They say that Penda covets the sword," the first said.

"Let him come and take it," said the other. "Wow! That would be a fight worth seeing. Yet Great Sword would beat him."

I turned and smiled at the speaker as I passed. What? Mighty Penda vanquished by a Hwiccan? The thought seemed too ridiculous.

We marched up to the end of the street where on a level commons two great men were marshaling a regiment of soldiers. We raised our heads high as we marched—were we not Mercians? All Penda's men were proud lords, for were they not the greatest fighters in the world? We wedged our way through the crowd that was gathered to see the marshaling, and many an oath was flung at us from men whom my soldiers tossed out of our path.

We stood at last inside the ring of spectators while I sent Wistan forward to announce a messenger from Penda. Courtesy bade us wait till Great Sword had completed his marshaling, but Penda's business could not wait for courtesy. I watched Wistan speak with Great Sword, then turn and come back to us, Great Sword resuming his work. Now this a little galled me. Who was this Hwiccan that he could so lightly treat the messenger of Penda?

"What saith he?" I asked Wistan.

"He says that Penda's message can well wait till he is through," said Wistan.

"By all the gods, does he say so, the puppy?" I exclaimed.

It chafed me that he could so lightly set me aside, but there was no remedy; we had to wait and wait for some time. At last he finished and the two great men came forward, the one with a huge sword in his hand, the largest and longest I had ever seen, the other with a mighty red ax across his shoulder. I looked at the second first; he was the same man that ran with the bears—yes, I could swear to it.

Those fierce eyes and that fiery beard I could not mistake. Aye, and there was the ax, the very same that the bear-man carried, and like to the one with Wulfhere's name carved on the furl. Then I looked on Great Sword, and ah, lords, my heart gave a leap and I well nigh fell from weakness. It was Wulfhere—Wulfhere my more than son—alive from the dead. The years had flown since he had vanished and a great change had come over him, for he was now grown a man and a man's beard grew on his upper lip, and his form was strong and handsome and well developed.

Ha, was there to be found his equal in all England? "So Penda looked," I said to myself, "when he was Wulfhere's age, yet not so handsome." Time had changed him yet I knew him. I knew him as soon as my eyes lit on him, but he knew not me, for my beard and my hair were white where once they had been as black as peat. Now it was in my heart to reveal myself and fall on his neck, but I restrained myself. I saluted him as he came forward.

"Sir Regent of Hwicce, it is scant courtesy thou showest the hand of Penda stretched out with a message for thee, to keep him waiting here thus long among this rabble," I said.

"It is a new thing, Sir Hand," he replied, "for a hand to speak proud words. Methought it was the office of the hand to do its master's work and to keep silence before its betters. Now if thou hadst been Penda's mouth I should have expected swelling words."

"Yet does the hand speak plainer than the mouth, Sir Regent," I retorted, "as deeds speak plainer than words. It is for this I am come hither as the hand of Penda, not as his mouth."

The great fellow put his fists on both his sides and laughed aloud, and Blood Ax with him.

"Hear him, Eanhere, the rat threatens the lion!" he roared. "Now by the gods," he said as he turned to me, "thou art but a little man to be the hand of Penda, and if thou art Penda's hand we have little to fear in Hwicce. What is thy message?"

Then I began with much haughtiness and scorn to give my message, for I wished to try the mettle of this cockerel.

"Penda the Strong, King of Mercia, and overlord of North and South Gwyre, East Anglia, Lindesey, Hecana, Mageseta and Hwicce, sendeth greeting to thee——"

"Thunar and Woden and all the Christian devils, hear him!" shouted Wulfhere, who though he had long since renounced the heathen gods still swore by them. "Penda, overlord of Hwicce, saith he! Man, man, if thou wert not so laughable I would

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grow angry with thee! Penda, overlord of Hwicce, forsooth! Since when, I pray thee, has Penda been our overlord?"

"Since he sent me to thee to demand tribute of thee and submission."

"So ho, hand of Penda, so that is thy business here, is it?" he asked.

"It is, Sir Great Sword, Regent of Hwicce and Captain of the Spirit-Bears of the Haunted Mountain, who before was Wulfhere the son of Edbert the son of Eorpwald."

Now Wulfhere when he heard these words opened his mouth in amazement.

"What knowest thou of the bears of the Haunted Mountain?" he asked in a quiet voice, for he did not wish that all those standing about should hear this.

"Two nights ago I dreamed a dream, Lord Regent—I and this thane here with me. My twenty men also dreamed part of this dream with us too. Strange, lord, that we all should dream the self-same dream, all in one night, and being wide awake. We heard the sound as of a hunting in the mountains. We lay upon a rock—this thane and I—and saw two deer go by, and after them we saw a pack of bears, white they were and brown, very large and strong. At their head two men in bearskins, one with a fiery beard, and a great ax in his hand, the other with a sword, the biggest I have ever seen, so big that he who held it could hardly carry it."

"Ha, there thou liest, Hand! A strange tale and an unlikely," he added. "No doubt ye all had too much mead. Saw ye a flock of fiery flying serpents also, and any dragons?"

"No serpents and no dragons, lord, but many bones of Mercians slain by spirit-bears and men with axes. Take notice—they that were slain were Mercians, Sir Regent. We found one ax, lord, brother to Blood Ax there—'Wulfhere owns me' it said upon the furl."

The two men looked at me with wide-opened, staring eyes and frowning brows, and I could see each toying with the handle of his weapon, for anger was in their hearts. The crowd were pressing around to hear the talk, but Wulfhere, who did not wish that they should hear too much, spoke to a captain who at once with some soldiers pushed the people back.

NOW was I baiting Wulfhere in good earnest, and I chuckled with amusement at his puzzled angry looks.

"Hand that sees and hears and speaks and sees all things save its own office, how knowest thou that I am Wulfhere, son of Edbert?" he asked.

"I know because I know," I mocked. "Perchance my spirit told me of it, perchance the Summer breezes whispered it in my ear, or perchance I heard the dew-drop tell the daisy. Perchance this or perchance that—it matters not who told me."

Wulfhere swore a great oath and raised his sword to strike.

"Answer, thou scum of Mercia," he thundered, "lest I speak to thee with my sword; answer, I say!"

I only laughed a sneering laugh and said:

"Each cock crows on his own dunghill. Hwiccan, I am no subject of thine—thank the gods—wherefore then should I obey thy order? I know because I know; it is enough for thee. Now to our business, I can not waste more words with thee."

He let his sword-point drop to the ground and looked around at Eanhere as if to say—

"What dost think of that?"

"Man without a name," he said at last, "speak up thy message."

"This is my message to thee, lord," I said. "Not long since, one Pellitus by name, came to thy court from Penda with a certain message. Him thou didst abuse or didst permit to be abused, and sent him back to Mercia almost naked, and empty-handed. Now Penda sends me also with a message. It is, that thou make thy submission to him and pay him tribute; also that thou aid him in his war he is about to wage against the Briton; also that thou hand over to him Great Sword thy weapon as a pledge that thou dost acknowledge him the overlord of Hwicce. Answer, thou that art not even a king, but a small lord of a petty kingdom that has no right to be called a kingdom—answer in few words and quickly!"

Wulfhere's face was a study. Long he looked at me as if he were trying to determine whether to strike me down or to let my big talk pass as the vaporing of a simple fellow.

"Pellitus the Second, it is well for thee thou art an ambassador," he said, "does

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Penda think that we are fools here that he sends an insolent fellow like thee to talk to us? Two of a kind now has he sent —Pellitus and thee. Pellitus was the better man—he lacked much of thy insolence."

I liked not Wulfhere's saying concerning Pellitus and myself, but said nothing, only I waited till he had finished.

"Go back to Penda," he continued, "and tell him we owe him no tribute neither will we make submission to him; neither will we fight against Cadwallo, but for him. This sword I hold for Eanfrith the king until he come of age. If Penda wants it let him come and take it if he can. Tell him we fear him not nor all his power. Let him come on I say. Great Sword would talk to him of a certain Edbert whom he has slain."

I shrugged my shoulders unconcernedly.

"As thou wilt," I said. "The fool answers according to his folly, and when the gods would destroy a man, they first make him mad. In two weeks' time Penda will be here, then he will trim thy horns, calf that bellowest like a bull."

Wulfhere fairly shook with fury. He ground his teeth and grasped tightly the handle of his sword.

"Hold, brother," Eanhere said to him; "remember this man must have safe conduct; strike him not."

"What is to hinder then that he be whipped and sent back naked?" Wulfhere asked.

"Nay, let him go," said his friend. "Let him go to his king. The quicker the messenger goes the quicker will he who sent him come; then will we talk with our swords and with our axes, and for all these insults perhaps get even."

"Go!" Wulfhere ordered, pointing to the street along which we had come. "Go, insolent, and thank the gods that we did not flay thee alive and hang thee up for rooks' meat!"

I made as if to go, then turned again to Wulfhere.

"Thou didst speak of a certain Edbert whom the king slew in Mercia. Thou sayest thou art his son. How camest thou, a Hwiccan, to be son to Edbert the Mercian?"

"Dost know of Edbert?" he asked eagerly. "Tell me, is it indeed true that Penda slew him?"

"I do know Edbert," I replied, "no man knows him better than I. If we could be in private I could tell thee much of him."

"Come with me, then," he said, and led the way into a house near by.

We walked into a room, and he, making sure there were none about, began:

"Tell me, I pray thee, of this Edbert. Thou hast been very insolent but I forgive thee all if thou wilt tell me of him, for in my heart I long to know."

Now the room was a little dark, and though he came close up to me and looked into my face, yet could he not see my features well in the dim light.

"Tell me this first," I said, "why hast thou done this mad thing—defy Penda?"

"Because he slew my father, Edbert, I hate him and defy him," he answered.

Now I could hold myself no longer, lords, for my bowels yearned toward him. I went to the window and drew back the curtain so the full light could stream in upon my face.

"Wulfhere," I said, "look upon me, Wulfhere! Dost thou not know me, boy, me that knew thee from the first?" And I stretched out my arms to him.

He came to me and looked close into my face, then throwing his arms about my neck he cried:

"My father, my father, I thought thee dead! Thanks be to the gods that they have brought thee back!" And he wept upon my breast and I on his.

Ah, lords, it was a happy hour when we two wept together. My old heart, broken long since with sorrow, was now again ready to burst with joy. Forgotten were all my troubles, vanished like foul ravens with their putrid carrion, and in their place came the white dove of peace. Yes, I, who had for many years past longed to die, now wished that I were young again that with my son I might live on.

We talked of many things. He asked of Ostryth and Elflaeda.

"Dead! Wulfhere, they are dead!" I said. "Dead at the hands of the Deirans."

He wrung his hands.

"Alas, Elflaeda!" he cried. "My father, how I loved her; but she is gone. There only remains to us the power to avenge her death, and we will do it."

I had it in my heart to tell him all the story of his birth that he might see Elflaeda was not his sister nor I his father, but I

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thought it wise to wait a while. I told him too of Cyneswithe, my sister, that was the wife of Penda, but as yet I told him not her message to her son. He also told me all his story, how Eanhere rescued him from the bear, how these two dwelt together in the mountains, how he had slain Wiglaf, and was now regent of the kingdom, and how he had taken to wife Imogen, the daughter of Brian, the first lord of the land.

"When I grow weary of court life," he went on, "I run out to yon mountain where Eanhere and I have a chase with the bears. I left Whichford for this sole purpose and had my run two nights ago. Ah, my father, it helps to drive sad thoughts away."

"My son," I said, "little wilt thou hunt deer with thy bears henceforth. Penda comes with an army to root thee out. Thou wilt have little time for aught save hunting men, if indeed they hunt not thee, which is more likely."

"Let him come," he said. "I long to meet him, for though thou art alive, my father, yet are there other things to be avenged."

I said nothing on this matter then, but I feared for Wulfhere. He would find little mercy at Penda's hand, and then would I lose my son again.

"No, Penda shall die first!" I said in my mind.

Wulfhere had intended starting on the march for Chester that very day, but gave orders that his men rest where they were till the morrow. That night he took me to the house reserved for him in the town, and brought Eanhere to me and told him all. I loved Eanhere for his fine heart and splendid fighting-strength, but most because he was my son's true friend. Wulfhere could not have a better brother to stand by him in peace or war. Imogen, Wulfhere's wife, too was there, for she would not leave him.

Her too I met and found very beautiful, but I could see that she was passionate and jealous-minded. Her eyes were ever on her husband, and if he smiled on any pretty lady there, she frowned. I think too that she did not like me, for Wulfhere seemed better to enjoy my company than hers, which she resented. It may be that she had some little cause to be jealous of her husband, for he was young and handsome and much spoiled by the great ladies of the land. Moreover, he liked their company, but he was ever faithful to his wife.

I feared there would be trouble from Imogen, and much trouble did come upon us by her means; but of that hereafter.

CHAPTER XXVI

HOW WULFHERE FOUGHT WITH PENDA

ON THE morrow I took Wulfhere apart and talked earnestly with him, for I had a plan to set before him.

"My son," I said, "let me not take this message of defiance back to Penda. Believe me, it means sure death to thee, and the plundering and desolation of thy kingdom."

"But we can fight," he said. "There is always a chance to win, or we can die like men."

"Time to die," I said, "when there is need. Hearken now to me! Penda, though still in his full strength, grows old; moreover, he is haunted by the spirits of those whom he has murdered. Not long since he saw a vision of my sister standing at his bedside and telling him his cup was almost full. I feel it in my heart he has not long to live. He feels it also and has set up Peada, his son, to rule for him the Middle Angles, and Merwal to rule those of the southern province.

Now Peada he loves—if such a man can love—but the people hate Peada. There is a way by which thou canst gain Penda's favor, and grow great in his shadow, then when he dies—which will be soon—I, Edbert, who am the greatest under the king, will give my pledge that thou shalt sit in Penda's seat."

"How could that be, my father," he asked, "when three sons of the king still live—Peada, Merwal and the youth Ethelred?"

"Peada and Merwal are both hated of the people," I answered. "Immin and Eafa and most of the lords will be with us, for thee will they love when they see thee and thy prowess."

"But by what means can I gain Penda's favor?"

"I will tell thee," I continued. "Peada, the favorite son of the king, would take a wife. The maids of Mercia are not fair enough to suit him; he must needs go afield. Now tidings have come from Deira

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that there lives a maiden there, the daughter of King Osric, who is the fairest in the world. Penda has sent to Osric on behalf of his son to ask her in marriage but Osric will not let her go. Penda is therefore wroth with Osric. Now do thou send word by me to Penda that thou wilt undertake to fetch the maiden for his son.

"Remember what the Deirans have done to me and thee—they have slain my wife and thy sister. Thou hast good cause therefore to go to war against them. Moreover, war is even now between the Britons and Edwin of Northumbria, who is overlord of Deira, Osric being king of that province. Invade Osric's land, steal away this maid and bring her to Penda. Let Edwin and Cadwallo fight it out between them; it will be thy chance to deal with Osric, for Edwin will have his hands full elsewhere."

"But our people have promised aid to Cadwallo."

"But thou art aiding Cadwallo when thou art waging war against Osric, the ally of Edwin."

"Nay, my father, it can not be; I go even now to reinforce Earl Brian in Chester. It can not be—not now. Besides, Penda would know me; am I not called Wulfhere still?"

"There are many called by that name, my son. How can he know that the lad he believes slain by the bear is the Regent of Hwicce? Nay, he will never know thee. Agree to my plan, my son," I pleaded.

"Not now, my father, it can not be," he said.

We said farewell and parted. On the fifth day I and my company met the vanguard of Penda's army on the march to Hwicce and turned with them. Penda and his guards were a full day's march ahead of the main army.

I told my message to the king.

"His blood be on his head!" he growled. "But where is this cockerel that crows so loud?"

"In Chester, Lord King," I said. "The King of Hwicce who is but a youth is in Worcester."

"I fight not with children; we go to Chester. But what sayest thou is the name of this man who really rules in Hwicce?"

"Wulfhere," I said, with some little dread of saying the name before him.

"Wulfhere! Wulfhere! Was not that thy son's name, Edbert, the same who looked not like his father or mother?"

"It was his name, King—his name who is dead—but there are many of that name."

"Perhaps," said he, "but it is not like that he would be Regent of Hwicce even if he lived. Enough, we will on to Chester."

In ten days we stood before the city. It was a large town with a wall about it the most part of which was very ancient—five hundred years or more they said it stood. The Romans who once held this land were the builders of it. Scouts had reported our approach; therefore when we reached the place we found the gates shut, and the walls bristling with the spears of the garrison. Penda had his men drawn up about five hundred paces from the city gates, on the east side of the city. Just at his back were many trees. He chose this position so that the garrison might not know how few his men were.

"SEE, my lord," said Wulfhere to Earl Brian as they watched the Mercians from the tower above the gate, "their force is small, not half the number of our men; let us sally out and cut them down."

"Nay, lord," Brian returned, "believe me yon force ends not with the trees. The little wood is full of them; we see but a small part of their host."

"It may be so," Wulfhere replied, "for from here it is hard to say, but my counsel would be to risk it and fall upon them."

"I think, brother, that Brian is right," Eanhere said. "Penda is not one to put himself recklessly into the enemy's power. He is brave but prudent also. Besides his main force can not be far distant. It would be folly to risk our garrison. Our strength lies in our walls, let us abide here till we learn more of Penda's strength."

"As ye will, lords," Wulfhere replied, "I yield to your judgment; yet it seems almost a pity to lose a chance of smashing this force and perhaps taking the king, and wait till the rest of his army comes up."

"Yet as we are placed we can afford to take no risks," Brian said.

All afternoon the captains of the garrison hastened hither and thither to see that every man was in his place and every point well guarded. Wulfhere, Brian and Eanhere watched from the tower above the gate. At six o'clock a herald supported

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by two men-at-arms came forward toward the gate from the Mercian lines. They stopped some twenty paces from it and one blew a blast on his horn. The three lords descended from the tower and ordered the draw-bridge to be let down, then passed over to greet the visitors. Wulfhere recognized in the herald one of his own childhood's playmates, though now he was grown a man and was a thane in Mercia.

"What is thy business here, Sir Herald?" he asked. "And why does Penda of Mercia invade our land to do us hurt who never injured him?"

"Art thou the Regent of Hwicce?" the Herald inquired.

"I am," Wulfhere responded.

"Hear then the message of him who sent me; Penda, King of Mercia and East Anglia, Lord of the South and Middle Angles, of Lindesey, of North and South Gwyre, and rightful over-lord of Hwicce, sendeth greetings. 'Why didst thou not send tokens of submission when I, Penda, sent my ambassadors to thy court? Pellitus thou didst abuse, and to Edbert thou didst give a scornful answer. Behold I have come in person to demand of thee that which my servants before me demanded. Surrender me this sword of thine, also thy person, with the keys of this city to do with them and with thee as I see fit, or refuse at thy peril!' "

"I refuse," said Wulfhere quietly.

The herald turned to Brian.

"Earl Brian, Penda bade me turn next to thee. This is his message: 'Give up this usurper into my hand that I may chastise him for his insolence. Think not that he or Cadwallo or thy Christian God can deliver thy land from my power. Have the gods of the East Angles, of Gwyre and Lindesey, or their kings delivered them from my hand? Make thy submission in peace that thy land may not be disturbed, but refuse my demand and thy nation shall perish, and thy country laid desolate with fire and sword.' "

Wulfhere drew the two lords aside.

"There seems to be but one thing that can save the country and city," he said. "Hand me over to Penda now, lords; better that one should perish than that a whole nation be put to the sword." This he said to try them.

Now Eanhere shook his great ax and swore a fearful oath, and Brian turned quickly to the herald.

"Sir Herald," he shouted, "go back to him that sent thee and say, 'Penda of Mercia, disturber of kingdoms and lover of blood, we spurn thy offers and scorn to listen further to thy overtures. Come and take us in Chester if thou canst! Cadwallo is at hand to save us, and the Lord our God, in whom we trust, He will deliver us!' "

The herald turned to go but Wulfhere called him back.

"There is a law in Hwicce," he said, "that gives the kingdom to him who can take the sword. Tell Penda I stand ready to hold it against him in mortal combat."

"I will deliver thy message, lord," said the herald, and with his men-at-arms he marched back to the Mercian lines.

Not half an hour passed when the towering form of Penda was seen striding toward the gate, attended by a single thane. In his huge fist he carried his great ax Skull-Cleaver. A heavy shield rimmed and bossed with steel was on his left arm, and in his belt a dagger. A formidable-looking man he was, a very giant in strength and proportions. By his side was Eafa, the best swordsman in Mercia, shorter by a foot than Penda, but thick-set and a mass of muscle.

Wulfhere tightened on his harness and, accompanied by Eanhere, Blood Ax strode out to meet the king. Penda had warned his men not to draw away from the edge of the wood lest the smallness of their numbers might be exposed, but so great was the eagerness of the soldiers to see the fight it was all the captains could do to keep them back. As for me, I took my stand with two other lords in a position from which I could witness the combat.

For a moment the two great men stood facing each other. They were of about the same height, though Penda was a little the taller. Wulfhere was not the giant that the Mercian was, being rather slim of build, though withal lithe and wiry, but he had a longer reach and was quicker in his movements than his opponent. I feared greatly for my son, for well I knew Penda's vast strength, but I knew also that Wulfhere had youth and great endurance on his side. It was the sword against the ax, now would we see whether of these two weapons was the fitter.

"Guard!" roared the king.

How can I tell thee of that fight, lords? My heart was in my mouth many times

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as I saw that great ax beat Wulfhere down to his knee time and again, and I heard the cheers of the men on the wall as he slipped like an eel from under Penda's blows. They rained like thunderbolts on shield and sword. No Wiglaf stood against him now, or two Wiglafs that never seemed to tire. Ah, lords, I turned sick at the sight. Wulfhere was to me as one already dead; no living man could long survive that awful rain of steel. I looked and saw the half of Wulfhere's shield fly from his arm, then pressed my hands over my eyes and turned away.

I heard the gasp that went up from the hundreds on the wall, and the roar of the Mercian men; then a mighty cheer from the Hwiccans and I looked again. The other half of Wulfhere's shield was flying straight at Penda's face. It hit him on the helm so that he staggered back a pace and seemed for a moment dazed. Wulfhere's two hands were on the handle of Great Sword. Straight at the staggering king he sprang, landing a half-warded blow on Penda's left shoulder. Quickly the Mercian was himself again, and the awful fight went on.

But now Wulfhere was no longer the beaten one. Great Sword rose and fell, and with awful force came down on Penda's shield. No sooner had the king warded one blow than it was time to ward another. Like lightning Wulfhere moved about his foe; like lightning flashed Great Sword above his head, and the sparks flew in showers from the bosses of Penda's targe and from the plates of his armor.

Again and again the ax rose for a blow, but shield and ax were needed together to stand the shock of Wulfhere's sword. It was his purpose to smash the Mercian's shield; then, with a weapon fourteen inches longer than Penda's ax, the advantage would be with him. But the shield was strong—never was a stronger made. It was hacked and bruised and bent and dented, but still it held.

"Curses on it was ever a shield like that!" I heard Wulfhere growl as he slackened his blows as if he almost despaired of ever accomplishing his purpose.

"Ha, thou growest weary, boy," said Penda; "now it is my turn again."

Backward they went and forward, now one seeming to have the advantage, now the other, and throwing words at each other as they fought.

"Guard that, Penda!"

"Ha, a good stroke! Here's one for thee, lad!"

"This for thee, Mercian!" as Great Sword bit through the opposing shield.

"Thou art a great fighter, Wulfhere. I sorrow to have—to slay—thee!" cried Penda between blows.

"Slay on! Ha!"

A great piece flew from the king's shield.

"Have at thee!" Penda shouted, and putting all his strength into a blow he hoped would end the battle he let drive at Wulfhere's head.

But Wulfhere was not there when the ax fell. And so the fight went on, till the combatants from very weariness ceased and leaned upon their weapons. Eanhere and Eafa spoke together, then Eafa approached the king.

"Lord Penda, it is enough; fight no more today," he said.

The king looked over at Wulfhere.

"Art thou content to finish this some other time?" he asked.

"I am content," Wulfhere answered.

"Good!" said the king.

He dropped his ax and battered shield on the ground and came toward Wulfhere.

"Let me look at thee, lad," he said.

For full a minute he gazed into Great Sword's face; then his eyes wandered over his splendid frame.

"Of all things in the world I love a valiant man," he exclaimed. "Thou art like enough to me to be my son. I would I had a son like thee, Wulfhere."

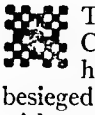
Wulfhere did not answer.

"I have not won the sword though I fought harder than ever I fought before," he continued. "Submit to me for my oath's sake, Wulfhere, and thou shalt be king of Hwicce, and I will make thee great."

"I submit not, Penda," answered Wulfhere, "to thee least of all men."

"As thou wilt," the king replied frowning. "Then I will have both sword and kingdom yet by force of arms."

He turned, picked up his ax and went back to his host.



THAT night came messengers from Cadwallo to Earl Brian saying he had heard how that Chester was besieged, and would be there on the morrow with ten thousand men. On the morrow when Wulfhere saw the glint of their spears

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afar off and knew that rescue was at hand, he sallied out with all his available force against Penda. They were two to one against the Mercian, but when was a Mercian not equal to two, yea three, Britons? Wulfhere did not hope to beat Penda, but to hold him engaged till Cadwallo came up and took him in the rear.

Fierce was the fight and long, but we stood like a rock against the Hwiccans, and many of them fell. Then a shout arose in our rear, and we saw the hosts of the Briton pouring down upon us. We were trapped like a few lions among a pack of wolves. Penda strove to cut a way through and escape. It was useless; the number against him was too many. Wulfhere with Eanhere at his side pushed through the press to the place where Penda was making his last stand.

It was in his mind to cut the Mercian down, but as one pities the lion harried by the wolves, so Wulfhere pitied Penda. Heaps of slain lay around and before the king. Ha, he was fighting gloriously; he would die like a man. Wulfhere pressed forward and confronted him.

"Yield thee, Penda, or thou art lost!" he cried.

"Ha, my Game-Cock! Come, let us finish our fight!" the king shouted.

"Look about thee, Lord King," I heard Wulfhere say. "Twelve thousand men surround thee, for Cadwallo is come. Yield now, and quickly while there is time, and thy life shall be spared."

"It is true, King," I said. "Yield to the regent."

Penda leaped upon a boulder and gazed about him. He saw his case was hopeless as he was completely surrounded by more than ten times his number. Better to yield and perhaps be rescued by his approaching army, than to die like a rat in a trap. He sprang from the stone, and holding his ax out to Wulfhere, he said:

"Enough! I yield to the Lord Regent."

"Good! Keep thy ax, King. Now when thou hearest the horn of Cadwallo blown, and mine also, blow thine too, King."

A messenger flew to the Briton king to tell him of the Mercian surrender, but came back saying Cadwallo was opposed to stopping the battle. Wulfhere himself had to go to him.

"It were folly to spare one of them," Cadwallo said. "Better kill them all when we can."

It was not before many sharp words were spoken that he agreed to accept the surrender. The horns were blown and the battle ceased.

Thus it was for the first time in his whole life that Penda the Strong yielded to mortal man. It was also the last.

CHAPTER XXVII

PENDA JOINS CADWALLO THE BRITON TO GO AGAINST EDWIN OF NORTHUMBRIA

IN THE council-hall at Chester, Cadwallo and his lords were met together to deliberate upon what to do with Penda, and what steps they were to take against Edwin. Many lords and thanes were there, for now that they saw their king had a large army at his back they flocked from all parts of his dominions to offer their services. Many of them were men who after his late defeat had drawn away from his cause, intending to be no more his vassals; now like the wind they veered about and flocked to Chester with their men-at-arms; a great multitude, and tendered their allegiance. Cadwallo frowned upon these, but he needed their help and swallowed his angry feelings against them.

The first thing to do was to dispose of Penda.

"A standing menace he has been to us," said the Briton, "and while he lives he so remains. I counsel that he be put to death, he and all those we have taken with him."

A lord from Gwyned rose and counseled the same thing.

"We have made a vow to exterminate the whole heathen race," he declared, "Angles and Saxons, who have settled unlawfully in our land. False we should be to our country, to our Christian faith and to our solemn oath were we to let this pagan live who has slaughtered so many of our people, who boasts himself the champion of the heathen gods and has sworn in their name to turn Christian Britain into heathen England. I counsel that he die."

"To let him go, Lord King," said another, "would be the height of folly. To keep him alive in prison would be the height of folly also. His army is even now on the march hither. So long as he is alive they will try to rescue him. Now that we are

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about to go against Edwin, we must not be troubled by other wars. Slay him, I say, and thou wilt find that the Mercians will not care to risk defeat at our hands fighting for a dead body. Moreover in Mercia they love him not."

Then rose Wulfhere.

"Lord King," he said, "I am against this counsel. King Penda is my prisoner, not thine, and though I owe thee duties as my over-lord and the over-lord of Hwicce, yet when did it come to pass that the captive of thy meanest thane was not his own to do with as he liked? To me the King of Mercia surrendered, trusting in my good faith, and by the sword I carry he will not trust in vain! My honor demands that he should live who gave his life into my hands on that condition. Thou hast the power, King, to take him from me, but give me leave to say I hesitate to think that thou wilt alienate one who as thy friend can give thee no little help, but as thine enemy can do thee no little harm."

The king looked very angry, but before he could make reply, Earl Brian spoke.

"Cadwallo, let me speak a word for my friend, the regent. Forgive this bluntness of his speech; he is an Englishman, and among the English freedom of speech even before kings is a right unquestioned, and though a Briton let me say I see much in that custom that is good and right. Better to openly express our thoughts on matters of deep interest to the state than to hide them and yet act according to them. Better for the king's sake and the country's, for then both know just where their chief men stand.

"Wulfhere is right, and I too must oppose the slaying of Penda and his people. In my eyes it would be a crime, and most dishonorable, first because he is not thy prisoner to slay, Cadwallo, and second because his life was promised him."

The king stood up.

"Earl Brian," he began, "association with thy son-in-law has turned thee, who wert once so good a Briton, half an Angle. Free speech thy over-lord has never forbidden, but insult he can not brook. If it is the English custom to make insult free, let me say I can not commend that custom. I have counseled that Penda should die. It is not my counsel merely; his fate rests with this assembly of which thou art a member, not with me. Thou sayest my counsel is dishonorable—yea, but thou didst," as Brian rose to protest it was not his meaning.

"My great concern is the welfare of my country and the success of our war with Edwin. I am not concerned with the fate of Penda except insofar as it seems to influence the objects close to all our hearts. The captive of the meanest thane belongs to his captor it is true, but when that captive is a king, whose life is a menace to the country's welfare, all private rights must give way to the public weal. What is the life of a Mercian beside the welfare of all Britain? We must let naught stand in the way of our great cause. If any can convince me that Penda living is safer for the state than Penda dead, I am ready to counsel that his life be spared."

King Margadug of the South Welsh arose. He was an old man and very wise.

"Lord King," he began, "methinks I can convince thee. Upon a time there lived a fox who greatly loved meal cakes. It was his wont to bake them on the coals, but they being very hot and he fearing to burn his hands, he seized neighbor cat who lived next door and with the cat's paws lifted off the cakes. What is to hinder thee, Cadwallo, from playing the fox? It has ever been thy purpose to drive the Angle race forth from the frontiers of Britain and seize their lands, which indeed belong to thee by right, since thou art the King of the Britons. Why burn thy fingers when there is no need, or why burn them more than is necessary?

"Use Penda as a cat's-paw. Make him swear that for his life and for the lives of all those with him he will join with thee to conquer Edwin, and never turn against thee. If he will swear it he will keep his oath, believe me, for pagan though he be he hath great regard for his honor. Where there is a doubt of Cadwallo alone overcoming Edwin, there can be little doubt of Cadwallo and Penda doing it. It were great pity, King, to let this chance which God has cast into our path slip by us. This is my counsel; take it, King, or leave it."

Now these words pleased well Cadwallo and his lords, and this advice they now determined to follow.

"When he has the cakes the fox can deal with the cat," the King said.

"Lead in the Mercian," he ordered.

Wulfhere rose from his place and, going to a door that led from the lower end of the

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hall, he led Penda and Eafa and myself before Cadwallo. I saw the Briton start when he saw us. Penda's ax was buckled to his side and his shield hung at his back. Eafa's sword also was at his belt, and mine too was in its place. Our hands were free, no chains had come near us. No guard was placed around us; we were as free as any man in all that hall and had been treated during our captivity as if we had been honored guests.

"What means this, lord?" I heard Cadwallo ask in an undertone of Wulfhere. "How comes it that these prisoners have not been put in irons, but have their weapons still with them?"

"They have been put in irons, King," returned Wulfhere; "we have their word and that is stronger than any steel."

"Strange ways you English have," Cadwallo growled.

I noticed that Penda heard the dialogue as well as I, though it was not meant for us to hear.

And now the two kings faced each other—the vanquished lion and the victorious fox.

"Penda of Mercia," Cadwallo began, "for what reason camest thou to my land to make war on my people? What have we done to thee that thou shouldst do this to us? What excuse dost thou give?"

"We made no war on thee, Cadwallo," Penda replied, "but on Wulfhere, Regent of Hwicce, who abused our messengers and defied us."

"And yet thou knewest, King Penda, that in making war on Hwicce thou wert warring also against me who am the over-lord of Hwicce."

"I knew not thou wert its over-lord, yet, over-lord or no, is a dependence of thine to ill-treat my messengers, insult and openly defy me, slaughter my soldiers sent into its mountains to recover a Mercian fugitive, and not be punished for it?"

"If this is all the truth—and I must say it is the first time it has reached my ears—was it for thee to take things into thine hands when a word from me might have set things right? Why did I not hear from thee before thou didst take this most unfriendly step?"

"Because, King, thou wert in Armorica, and because as I have said, I knew not thou wert over-lord of Hwicce."

"Enough of this!" Cadwallo went on. "King Penda, thou hast slain many of my subjects. Their blood cries for thy blood, yet are we willing to grant thee life and liberty on one condition."

"Name it, Cadwallo!"

"It is this—thou wilt swear to aid me in my war against Northumbria with all the force at thy disposal, and be ready to continue thy aid till Northumbria is in my hand."

"It is a big thing to ask, Lord King," Penda said; "suffer me first to take counsel with my lords here before I answer thee."

"Do so," said Cadwallo, "but remember it is thy life and the lives of all with thee, or this."

We went aside into a corner of the room where we could whisper together without danger of being heard.

"Counsel me, Edbert; shall we do this or take the chance to get free from this place when our men come up? Wulfhere and Brian methinks will not see us put to death."

The king looked at me, waiting for a reply.

"Hearken, Penda," I said. "There is a thought come to my mind. Swear what he asks; 'twill work out altogether to thy profit. It is thy ambition to be lord of all England. To be so thou must overcome Edwin of Northumbria, who is at this moment, perhaps, the strongest king in the land. Alone it is doubtful if thou canst conquer him, but before Penda and Cadwallo together he must surely fall. Use this Briton as a cat's-paw, Penda, and make him help to conquer Northumbria for thee. When Edwin is overcome, believe me, thou canst easily manage this Cadwallo."

Now this I said, lord, not knowing at the time that almost the self-same words were spoken by Margadug, King of South Wales, when he advised his over-lord.

"Edbert, thou hast the wisdom of a Woden. Ha! It will be easier than I thought to take this oath," said Penda, a grim smile on his face.

Once more we stood before Cadwallo, and Penda addressed him.

"Lord King, we have taken counsel together and I agree to take this oath on one condition—I am required in no way to hold thee as my over-lord. Rather would I die than confess any man in England to be above me."

A smile of satisfaction appeared on Cadwallo's face as he answered:

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"Enough, brother of Mercia. Henceforth thou art my ally and friend! No question of overlordship shall come between us. As two free kings we march together to drive out Edwin. Thy hand, King Penda!"

He rose and the two kings grasped right hands. Penda was given a seat at the Briton's right at the council-board, and Eafa and myself also took seats among the councilors. It was decided to march at once into Northumbria, that is, as soon as Penda's army should arrive. On the second day after, it reached Chester.

A MIGHTY host it was that prepared to do battle with the Northumbrian. Under Cadwallo were the ten thousand that Solomon of Armorica sent, led by the Armorican chief, Cadvan; three thousand led by Margadug of South Wales; three thousand led by the King of Gwyned; three thousand under the King of Dyfed; two thousand under the King of Powis; and under the King of Cornwall five thousand men; also from Cumbria came three thousand. Under Cadwallo therefore were twenty-nine thousand men.

The King of Hwicce, Eanfrith, remained in Worcester, but Wulfhere, the Regent, with the Earls of Worcester, Gloucester, Chester and Hereford added to the ranks five thousand men. The Earls of Litchfield and Shrewsbury with their thanes had deserted to Edwin. With Penda came the lords of Mercia, namely, Peada, King of the Middle Angles, Merwal, King of the South Angles, the Earls of Lindesey, of North and South Gwyre, of Nottingham, Warwick, Derby and Leicester, of Huntington and Bedford, with their men. These numbered thirteen thousand. The number of all the host that marched from Chester therefore was forty-seven thousand.

A gallant sight they were as they streamed like a long, wide, glittering river from Chester to the northeast, their banners flying, their many-colored uniforms and glistening spears and armor shining in the sun. Like great waves on the sea they rolled along over hills and valleys, till Chester with its weeping wives and children was left far in the rear, and the level plains of Deira began to stretch before them. In the van marched Penda and his host. It was the place of honor, but Cadwallo was willing to accord it to the Mercian, for was it not the place of most danger too? Besides it was Cadwallo's plan to please in every way his new ally so Penda would suspect nothing on his part.

After the Mercians marched the Hwiccans, then the Armoricans, and last of all Cadwallo and his Britons. Through all that long march northward I had the joy of Wulfhere's company, and my sorrows left me. We talked of many things during those days, and each reviewed the story of his life during the years of our separation, to the other. My daughter, Elflaeda, was ever in our thoughts.

"Who knows? Elflaeda may even yet be alive," Wulfhere said.

"We shall see when we come to Deira," I answered.

And so the days dragged on until we entered Edwin's land, and he came forth to bar our progress. Now this Edwin of Northumbria against whom this vast host was proceeding was a Christian.

CHAPTER XXVIII

HOW PENDA CHOSE TEN CHAMPIONS TO FIGHT WITH EDWIN AND HIS TEN

WHAT need to say more of that long and toilsome march into Northumbria? On the third of the ides of October in the year six hundred and thirty-three of our Lord, Penda and Cadwallo encamped on the plains of Heathfield, while over against them lay the army of Edwin and his allies. Under the banners of the Northumbrian king were some forty thousand men. With him were Osric his cousin, King of Deira; Godbold, King of the Orkneys; Eanfrith, King of Bernicia; the Earls of Dorham, Richmond, Ripon, Stamford, Leeds and Holderness, with their thanes and regiments; also the earls of Litchfield and Shrewsbury who had deserted from Hwicce. Edwin's warlike son, Osfrid, was with him also, and another son, Eanfrid.

All day the preparations for the conflict went forward on both sides, and on the morrow, the twelfth day of October the whole host on either side was lined up for the battle. Neither side had any advantage as far as position went, the plain being broad and level, nor was there any great skill shown in the disposition of the rival armies. On the right wing was the Armorican with his ten thousand, and opposed to him the Bernicians; on the left

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wing Penda and his Mercians, and over against them Osric of Deira and his host; in the center was Cadwallo and his Britons with the Hwiccans under Wulfhere at their left, while opposed to them were the King of the Northumbrians himself with his sons and the main body of his army.

Supporting Cadwallo's rear was a regiment of eight hundred horsemen, the only company of horse on the field that day. There was no cavalry among the English; they liked better to fight on foot. Sometimes their leaders rode, but it was only that they might the more speedily get from place to place among the ranks to encourage and command. When they fought they fought on foot. This, lords, is known to you.

Christian altars had been set up before the hosts of the Britons and Armoricans, and Cadwallo's priests were busy administering Christ's Body and Blood among the soldiers. They came not near to those English who were Christians, for they were proud men, lords, those priests, and had no dealings with those whom they looked upon as Samaritans, even though they worshiped the same Christ. The chanting of the Christian priests could be heard clearly by our Mercian host, and a monotonous, mournful dirge it seemed to me at the time.

"Hearken to them, Edbert," said Penda to me; "one would think they were preparing for their funeral. A fine tune to rouse a soldier's soul to fight for victory. Ha, let us show them!"

His priests had just completed their single sacrifice of a horse to Woden. Penda leaped upon a boulder and blew a blast on his horn. Instantly all eyes were turned in his direction. He raised his ax and the great Mercian song of victory pealed forth:

> "Penda the Terrible,
> Penda the Glorious,
> Woden the war-god's son,
> Pride of old Mercia."

The great song caught up by thirteen thousand throats swelled out in a mighty chorus, and the warriors waved their weapons in the air or clattered them on their shields. Louder and louder swelled the song. The Christian service ceased as all Cadwallo's army looked and listened spell-bound to the Mercian anthem. Across the field we could see the Northumbrian host regarding us as the Britons were, and then the great song died away with a rattle of shields and weapons.

There were many men in Penda's army weary and sick from the toilsome march they had made; there were many whose thoughts were with their wives and children at home, whom as like as not they would never see again; there were many whose hearts failed them for fear of the coming battle; but the roll of the song was the touch of a wizard's wand, and the coward became brave, the sick and the weary strong, the visions of home with its weeping wives and children went from the eyes of the homesick, and all longed now as eagerly for the fray as before to be from it.

Ah, what a song was that! Believe me, it did more that day, though it was a heathen strain, to win that fight than Cadwallo's "*Miserere*" did. Why do we Christians chant our dirges on the field of battle before the fight? 'Tis well enough to mourn our sins but let us mourn them at some other time, the day before or the day after, not on the day of battle. Are there no Christian songs of victory to stir the hearts of men and give them strength and courage for the fray? Aye, there are many. Why not then leave our "*Miserere*" and our "*De Profundis*"—songs that weigh us down to earth—for other days, and on the day of battle sing loud the bright "*Te Deum*" and the great "*Domini est Terra.*"

It was the custom in those days even more than now for warriors, anxious to gain renown, to come before the host before the battle joined and challenge any adversary to mortal combat. Oftentimes indeed, as ye know, the success or failure of a cause for which kings fought was left to be decided by chosen champions who did battle against each other, each king abiding by the result. Now Edwin's warriors were renowned throughout all England for their great prowess in the field. Seasoned fighters they were, who in a hundred contests had learned to wield the sword or ax as few could wield them.

Edwin himself had never been overcome, and among all his paladins he stood the first, not because he was the king alone, but because he was the strongest and most skilled. It was in his mind to have this whole war settled by calling Cadwallo forth to single combat. A herald therefore was sent to the British king with Edwin's message:

"I, Edwin, King of Northumbria, call on thee, Cadwallo, King of the Britons, to

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come forth like a man and defend thy cause by thy right hand. Why should thousands bleed when thou and I can settle this matter? Thou hast done a vile thing, Cadwallo, in joining thyself to a pagan to make war on a fellow Christian. Come forth then and fight. If thou winnest then Northumbria is thine, if I win thou art my vassal. Fight then, Cadwallo, and let the God in whom we both believe decide whose cause is just."

Cadwallo laughed aloud.

"Sir Herald," he said, "it is true that David went up against Goliath, but I am not David. Nay, nay! I well know that God will decide in Edwin's favor, for I am no match for Edwin who is the first fighter in all England. Without shame I decline this fight, for only a fool would go up against such a foe knowing he must be slain."

"THEN I am that fool and I will go up against him, King!" Penda growled. "And there are a score more in my army, fools like me, who do not tremble at the name of Edwin, who would go up and win. I count it a base thing, King of the Britons, that this challenge should be declined. Sir Herald," he cried, "is Edwin content with Penda for an adversary?"

"He is content, King of the Mercians," replied the herald. "He bade me turn to thee if Cadwallo failed him. Moreover he bids me say to thee, 'Why leaguest thou thyself with the enemies of thy race, and goest up with them against thine own people? Are we not English both, and ought we not to stand together against the Briton? It is an evil thing, Penda of Mercia, that a brother should unite with an enemy to slay a brother. Therefore thou art a traitor to thy race and deservest to die. Come forth and fight."

Now Penda was very wrath when he heard these words.

"Go back to thy king, Sir Herald," he said, "and say to him, 'Penda of Mercia sendeth greeting. Art thou turned preacher? I will turn preacher too. No traitor am I to my race, but thou art the traitor and renegade to the gods of thy fathers whose champion I am. Why forsake thou Thunar and Woden and takest up the strange gods of the Christians to worship them? Traitor and renegade to thy faith, I, the avenger of Woden, will chastise thee for thy sin, and by the gods I swear that brother or no brother thy head will grin upon the altar of Tiw ere another sun has set!' Go, tell thy king that Penda will meet him in mortal combat, and let the gods decide between them!"

The herald turned to go but Cadwallo stopped him; then, turning to Penda, he said:

"Lord King, this may not be. Remember that according to this challenge our cause must be settled by the issue of this fight. I am in no mind to consent to leaving our cause to be decided by so doubtful a contest. Fight Edwin if thou wilt, but by our hosts our cause must be decided, and by no other way. Go back, Herald, and tell this to thy king."

Penda frowned and would have answered, but the herald was before him.

"Since thou hast so little confidence in the justice of thy cause, Cadwallo," he said, "that thou wilt not leave it to God to settle through the combat, my Lord Edwin bids me call upon thee or Penda here to choose out ten of thy best warriors, and he will choose ten also. For their own glory and for the honor of their country let them fight before the battle joins. The men thou choosest must be noble, Lord King, and a king must lead them, as Edwin will lead his ten. This is an offer thou canst not honorably refuse."

Penda's eye beamed, but the Briton frowned again.

"We are not here to learn honor from thee, Sir Herald," Cadwallo said, "nor did we come to this land to ask Edwin's advice as to how we should begin to conquer it. We make our own conditions, and we fight or decline to fight as our own wisdom dictates, and not at Edwin's bidding. Yet will we consider thy last offer."

He turned to Penda.

"My Lord King, a word with thee."

The two kings went aside to talk the matter over. The Briton was against accepting the challenge. In his opinion it was but a ruse on Edwin's part to kill off our best men so that we would lack leaders for the coming fight.

"I tell thee, Penda," he said with great emphasis, "Edwin's paladins have no match in all England. They are his guard, few of them nobly born, but whom he has ennobled for their great prowess and that they may be in a position to fight even with

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kings. There are not three in all our host that can stand up against them. Thou only, and Wulfhere, and perchance this fiery bear-man with the great ax, could match them, but what are three against eleven?"

Penda insisted as emphatically that the challenge be accepted.

"Have thy way then," the Briton answered, secretly hoping that Penda would fall in the contest, yet far too cunning to let his hope be even guessed at. "Have thy way, but if thou art vanquished let it not be said I did not warn thee."

He turned to the lords who were all gathered about the two kings.

"Ye have heard the challenge—who of you will accept a place among the ten?"

Full thirty of the lords and thanes claimed the right. Cadwallo chose from them ten men, four of them being Britons and Armoricans and Hwiccans, the other six and Penda were all Mercians. The two Hwiccans chosen were Wulfhere and Eanhere. Cadwallo had no desire to have his own lords slain, his desire was that if men must be killed they should be Penda's men, not his.

"See, Penda," he said, "I give thy warriors the preference. It is a compliment to them to be picked out as better fighters than my own men."

"Yes, King," answered the Mercian, "it is a choice I can not agree with or consent to. Seven Mercians, one Briton, one Armorican, and two Hwiccans; 'Tis not a fair choice, King."

"Choose thou then," said Cadwallo.

"First then I choose of the Hwiccans, Wulfhere and Manhere," began Penda.

"Good!" said the Briton.

"Of the Armoricans I choose Cadvan and Condidan."

"Nay, nay!" cried Cadwallo. "If these are slain then the Armoricans are left leaderless."

"And if I be slain what of my Mercians, King?"

"I told thee, Penda, I was against this fight, that it was a ruse to slay our best men before the battle, and so cripple us. Prudence is the better part of valor, and I am not a coward because I am prudent."

"But are the leaders of the Mercians to go forth and risk being slain, and are not the leaders of the Britons and Armoricans to do likewise?" retorted Penda. "See then, King, choose thou the Armoricans, but choose at least one of these two."

Now the second in command of the Armoricans had married Cadwallo's daughter. He was a nephew of Solomon, King of Armorica, and but a young man. Cadwallo must needs choose between the two. He chose Cadvan.

"It is well," said Penda, "now choose another."

The Briton chose another.

Now Penda could be cunning as well as Cadwallo.

"Of the Britons I choose Farinmoeil, son of Margadug of South Wales."

The old king's jaw fell as he heard his son's name called. He had counselled to make Penda a cat's-paw, and now Penda was about to send his son and heir to death. There were better warriors than his son among the Britons; why then choose his only son? Had Penda motive in his choice? Were his eyes set on South Wales? It was well known he had sworn to be king of all Britain if the gods gave him life.

"We shall see," said the old man to himself.

He would watch Penda's choice most carefully and then denounce his purpose to Cadwallo.

"I choose the King of Gwy ned," Penda continued.

"Ha! I read him like a boo k," old Margadug thought. "Malgo of G wyned is a childless man."

Now Penda paused and fixe his eyes on Cadwallader, the son of Cadw allo. I saw the British king shift uneasily in his place, and then give a great sigh of relief as Penda's eyes turned from Ca lwallader to the King of Cornwall. It was in the Mercian's mind to choose Ca lwallo's son, but that young man was c ly a third-rate fighter and Penda fearec his purpose might be exposed if Cadw lader were chosen, or that Cadwallo wou find a way to prevent the combat for h son's sake. He chose therefore the King o Cornwall, a notable fighter.

When old Margadug saw enda's eyes fixed on Cadwallo's son he felt hat his surmise was correct, but when I heard him choose the King of Cornwall w m he could not very well have overlooked he old man did not feel sure of his groun Wulfhere and Eanhere the main prop: of Hwicce, Farinmoeil the hope of South W es, Cadvan

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the leader of the Armoricans, the childless Malgo of Gwyned, and the King of Cornwall—take them away and their several peoples are crippled indeed. Yes, he would speak to Cadwallo. But when he heard the Mercians chosen he was in doubt again. Was not Penda venturing his own life and the noblest in his kingdom with him?

"Of the Mercians, O King, I choose the Earls of Lindesey, of South Gwyre, and Eafa, my captain. With these three I will do battle with Edwin's men."

Great Immin standing at my side growled out:

"Why was not I chosen also? Am I become too old to fight?"

I bade him hold his peace.

"If Penda falls," I said, "one must lead his host; wouldst leave the Mercians leaderless? Penda depends on thee."

He seemed satisfied with my assurance, though I could see he itched for the fight.

AND now the chosen champions went each to prepare for the coming contest. I saw Margadug of South Wales draw Cadwallo aside. What words he spoke I could not hear, but afterward I heard from one of the Briton lords who was near to them. He tried to show the British king that Penda chose not the best fighters with a view to overcoming Edwin, but he chose men the loss of whom would cripple their several peoples.

"It is his intent to weaken thee and us," he said, "that he may the easier overcome us when he is ready to go against us. When was the King of Gwyned accounted a great fighter, or my poor son, the hope of my people and of my old age? The Armorican is a skilled leader but there are a score in his host can fight better than he. I tell thee, King, Penda has his eyes on Hwicce too since he would remove Wulfhere and Eanhere who are its props. And didst thou see his eyes fixed on thy son? He has chosen kings too from the Britons, but only earls from Mercia."

Cadwallo scratched his head in thought a moment.

"And yet I can not see what can be done," he said. "I do suspect the Mercian also, and yet why would he cripple us before this battle with the Northumbrians, and risk defeat for himself? I suspect his intentions, and yet I doubt my own suspicions. He has chosen men who have more nobility than strength, and yet how can this choice advantage him in this fool contest, and after it in the battle between the armies?

"The poorer the warriors fighting among his ten, the more danger to himself. As for his earls, some of them are more powerful and have a greater following than some of our kings whom he has chosen. Penda suffers none to be kings in his land save his own sons and himself. I saw him fix his eyes on Cadwallader, but if my son had been chosen I was in honor bound to let him go."

This he said, though well Margadug knew Cadwallo would have found means to prevent his son going.

"But my son, King, I would save my son from this butchery!" the old man cried.

"I sorrow for thee," Cadwallo answered, "but I know not how to remedy it. Thyself advised to save this Mercian against my counsel. It seems that he has small liking for the office of the cat, but prefers that of the fox, and would make us the cat's-paws."

The tears rolled from the old man's eyes.

"Help me to save my son," he pleaded. "He is my only child! Save him, Cadwallo! Think of my services to thee and to thy father; do they deserve no recognition at thy hand? All I ask of thee is to help me save my son!"

Cadwallo was moved.

"Come with me to Penda," he said. "If his heart is not stone he will listen to thee."

They came together to the tent of the Mercian King. I was with Penda at the time, as were Merwal, his son, and Immin and half a dozen thanes. The old man pleaded his cause with tears. Cadwallo also spoke for him, and I and other thanes there present. Then happened a thing that greatly surprized us. Merwal, the son of Penda, a frail youth just grown to manhood, one of a dissolute life and somewhat despised by the Mercians, yes, and even by his own father, added his voice to the pleaders. The king looked at him a moment then turned to Margadug.

"Does thy son know thou pleadest for him?"

"Nay, he knows not, King, and would not consent to it if he knew. Even now he sings as he prepares for the combat."

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"I rejoice to hear that, King of South Wales," resumed Penda. "Thy son is excused from the contest; Merwal, my son here, takes his place."

Merwal was taken aback for a moment but soon was himself again.

"It is well, my father." he said. "I go to prepare myself."

But there was a general chorus of disapproval, even Margadug protesting.

"Thy son is too frail to fight in this battle, King," Cadwallo said. "It were murder to choose him. There are many others to choose from. Choose another, Penda."

"Thou hast a son, Cadwallo. See! We will draw lots to see whose son it will be, thine or Margadug's or mine. Is not that fair and just? Edbert, fetch hither the lot."

Now Cadwallo's face turned pale and he would have answered, but was interrupted by a man pushing through between the guards at the door of the tent.

"What means this interruption?" Penda thundered.

A young man strode forward and stood before him.

"King of the Mercians, I am Farinmoeil, son of Margadug. I have been chosen one to fight in the coming contest. I have just heard that my father is here to bring disgrace upon me by pleading to let me off. I have been chosen, and by Heaven I will not be put off!" And he glowered upon Penda and upon Margadug, his father.

"Young man, I like thy courage," Penda said. "Thou art a worthy son. But see, thou art too young to go into this fight against seasoned warriors; it means sure death to thee. Besides thy father is old and thou art his only hope. We were about to cast lots——"

"I will have no lots cast in the matter! It is a question of my honor! It is I who have been chosen and it is I who will fight!" cried the young man.

"What sayest thou, Margadug?" asked Penda.

The old man laid his face in his arm.

"I would have saved him, but I love him the better now to see he prizes honor more than life. Let be! Perchance the Almighty will preserve him."

He leaned upon Cadwallo's arm and, followed by his son, went back to his own tent.

CHAPTER XXIX

HOW PENDA AND HIS TEN PALADINS FOUGHT EDWIN AND HIS TEN

THE sun was high in the heavens when the champions advanced from either host and took up their position midway between the two armies. First came the Northumbrians to the cheers of their countrymen. They stood in a long line each man seven paces from his neighbor. At the extreme right stood Higbald and next him his brother, Wigred, men of enormous stature, both. They were Bernicians and carried war-axes. The third from the right was Godbold, King of the Orkneys, with eagle plumes on his helm, a tried warrior from his youth.

The Hwiccan, Alhwine, Earl of Litchfield, stood next, and next him Osfrid the young but experienced son of Edwin. Noble he looked with his long golden hair and his honest blue eyes, and ever and anon his father glanced at him with a look of mingled pride and anxiety, counseling him from time to time. Edwin himself stood next, towering almost a head above his son. A man of heavy build he was, fair like most of his race and very tall. He carried an enormous ax at his belt, and on his left arm hung his shield, not large but heavy and almost impenetrable.

On his left was Beorn, and next him Brand, Deirans massive in shoulder and chest, the most skilled swordsmen with one exception in Edwin's host. That exception was the warrior who stood next, tall and athletic, with black beard, flashing black eyes, and hair like the raven's wing. He hummed a song where he stood, and twirled his sword in his hand. This was Northumbria's greatest paladin, and a formidable man indeed he looked. Not Edwin himself, they said, was a stronger fighter. Osred was the warrior's name. Gewis, who slew an ox with his bare hands, and Yffi, a grandson of Ella, first King of Deira, made up the Northumbrian eleven.

To the noise of the shouting of the Mercians and Britons their chosen champions advanced and took their stand directly opposite their adversaries. The two Armoricans on the extreme left opposed the Bernicians; Farinmoeil the Briton faced the King of the Orkneys; Eanhere next eyed his opponent the traitor Lord of Litchfield;

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then Wulfhere opposite Osfrid Edwin's son; the King of Cornwall opposed Edwin, and Malgo of Gwyned faced Beorn the Deiran; Penda of Mercia stood opposing Brand the swordsman, and the Earl of Lindesey, Osred the Black; the Earl of South Gwyre came next against Gewis the ox-slayer, and Eafa stood against Yffi.

A hush spread through the two armies as they waited a hundred yards behind their champions for the trumpet blast that was to be the signal for the encounter. Two men advanced, the one a Briton, the other a Northumbrian, and took their stand each behind his own king's champions. Two blasts from their horns rang out together, and the fight began. I can not tell you, lords, of the excitement of that fight. Soldiers on either side crowded close upon the lines drawn before them which they were not to pass. Each cheered the strokes of his own champions in his own way—the Britons and Armoricans yelled, the Northumbrians shouted, and the Mercians roared.

Down went Yffi with Eafa's sword-point sticking through his back. The Earls of Lindesey and South Gwyre fell before Osred and Gewis. Penda's great ax shore through Brand's shield and sword-arm, and the next stroke cleft Brand's skull. Beorn slew Malgo of Gwyned, and Edwin stretched the King of Cornwall dying on the field. The two Armoricans fell before the Bernicians. Godbold smote Farinmoeil, Margadug's son, and killed him, and Eanhere sprang like a wolf at Alhwine of Litchfield.

"Traitor!" he cried, and before Alhwine could guard himself, like lightning Blood Ax fell and cleft his head even to the shoulder.

Very loath to slay the fair-haired youth who stood before him, Wulfhere waited his chance and smote Osfrid a glancing blow upon the helm, hoping to stun, not kill him. The young man fell just as his father killed Blederic of Cornwall. Edwin saw him fall and rushed to him. He raised his son's head up tenderly, speaking gentle words to him, for he loved Osfrid. Wulfhere who stood leaning on his sword saw a tear standing out on the father's face.

"He is not dead, King," he said in pity; "I smote to stun not to slay, for I could not kill the youth."

"Nay, but he is dead, my son is dead," Edwin answered. "Behold how the bone is thrust into his brain."

He had taken off Osfrid's helm and was feeling the wound. Wulfhere knelt down and felt the young man's heart. There was not a beat—he was dead.

"Believe me, King, I would give my right hand rather than have had this happen," he said. "I blame myself, King, but I meant not to smite so hard."

"I blame thee not, Hwiccan," Edwin replied. "It was done in fair fight." Then gazing long at his son's pale face he cried bitterly:

"Osfrid my son, my son! Would God I had died instead of thee! Alas, alas, my pride, my boy is dead!"

He placed a kiss upon his dead son's forehead, then laid the body gently on the sand and staggered to his feet like one half in a faint. Osred came over, and supporting him drew him back some twenty paces from the fighting-ground. Wulfhere's heart smote him for pity, and he kept repeating to himself:

"I meant not to slay the lad, I meant not to slay him."

Seven Northumbrians still stood, and but four Mercians and Hwiccans. King Edwin seemed incapable of fighting more, he was dazed with grief. Osred remained with him to support him. Four of the seven Northumbrians advanced to meet their opponents, the fifth—Gewis—stood back.

And now the fight began again. Eanhere's ax bit through the skull of Higbald after some minutes' fight. Penda more easily finished Godbold of the Orkneys. Eafa went down before Beorn, and a groan went up from the Mercians as they saw him fall. I saw Penda look toward his captain anxiously. Great Sword in the hand of Wulfhere did not fail its master.

A mighty thrust and it found the heart of Wigred even through his chain-mail shirt. Wigred was the first to fall and Gewis took his place. One stroke and his shield was shivered, the next and he lay stretched upon the body of Wigred.

There remained now three to three. I saw King Edwin shake himself as if pulling himself together, then with Osred on his right and Beorn on his left he strode forward. Penda with Wulfhere at his right and Eanhere at his left stepped forth to meet them.

Eanhere raised his ax, then lowered it again as he stared at Osred.

"Osred, by all the gods!" he cried.

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"What, Eanhere my cock, and is it thou?" came the answer, and throwing down his sword Osred threw his arms about his friend, and the two danced around hugging each other like bears.

"And to think that I was about to kill thee, brother," gasped Osred, "to hurl thy soul to the dark realm of Tiw."

"Nay, Osred," answered Eanhere, "it was I that was about to slay thee. Ah, to think that I was about to end my blood-brother's life!"

"Nay, nay, worry not about that, Eanhere. Alas, we must fight, and one of us must die, my brother, but it is not I. Cruel necessity that I should have to rob my bear-children of their foster-father. What shall I do, Eanhere, to give them another?"

"Trouble not about them, Osred, they will not lose their foster-father. Thee they have lost already so they will not miss thee when I slay thee. It grieves me, my brother, but we must fight—fight to the death."

"Alack, thou art right! Guard thee, Eanhere!" answered the other, and sword and ax met in fearful combat.

MEANWHILE Wulfhere had slain his man, and avenged Eafa. He now stood watching the others. Awful was the combat of the kings. Two giants they were in strength and stature. Now one seemed to gain an advantage, now the other. The great axes rose and fell and clashed together, or crashed upon the opposing shields. Never had such a battle been seen by either army. The kings seemed tireless and rained their blows without a pause. They only ceased fighting to draw breath after full twenty minutes' strife. Eanhere and Osred also ceased, panting and heaving.

"Eanhere, my brother," said Osred, "we have fought enough. I would not have thy blood upon my hands, and I know that thou dost feel the same toward me."

"I do, Osred," replied Eanhere, "but what then? We must fight till either die or both."

"See yonder man with the great sword," said Osred, pointing to Wulfhere, "let me fight him."

"But if thou canst not kill me neither canst thou kill him. More like he will kill thee."

"No matter; better that he should do it than that thou shouldst, my brother. Dost agree, Eanhere?"

"Aye, Osred, but thou goest to thy death."

Osred walked across to where Wulfhere was standing.

"Come, Hwiccan, till I kill thee," he said.

"Kill on," replied Wulfhere, and the two rushed together.

The strife was fierce and the two kings stopped for breath and watched a while. Sword to sword was more to Osred's liking than sword to ax, but try as he would his many tricks of fence and attack he could not get behind Wulfhere's shield. He attacked Wulfhere furiously, and many times the latter was in peril. Suddenly Wulfhere flung aside his shield. He grasped Great Sword in both hands, and charged upon Osred with a shout.

Crash! went the mighty weapon on Osred's targe. No shield could stand that stroke; it went to pieces on Osred's arm. *Crash!* again the sword fell with awful force upon Osred's sword, leaving only the hilt in his hand. The next stroke fell on the Northumbrian's shoulder, and sank deep down into his chest. His body tottered for a moment, then fell with a thud, and Edwin's greatest paladin lay dead.

The two kings had forgotten they had not finished their battle, so interested were they in this fight between their best champions.

"Have at thee, traitor to thy gods!" growled Penda.

"Guard thee, Mercian, betrayer of thy race!" retorted Edwin.

Suddenly Penda sprang forward and struck a fearful blow at Edwin, who avoided it by stepping quickly to one side. So heavy was the stroke that Penda was half overbalanced. Edwin saw his advantage and swinging his massive battle-ax above his head he brought it down with terrific force. I thought that Penda's time was come, but quick as thought he interposed his shield which resounded with the blow. Then followed blow on blow till it looked as though the strife would never end. The excitement grew intense. The armies shouted and groaned at every stroke.

And now Penda's ax penetrated the tough shield of his opponent and gashed him in the shoulder. With a roar of fury Edwin returned the blow. The sharp edge of his blade smote the blade of his adversary's just where the handle entered it, and sent it spinning to the ground, leaving only the

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iron handle in Penda's grasp. A groan went through the Mercian lines, and I turned my eyes away as I saw Edwin with ax upraised rush at the Mercian king.

When I looked again Penda had closed with his opponent. His giant arms were flung around his foe. Up and down they swayed, tugging and straining with all their power, Edwin striving to bring his ax-blade down on Penda's head, Penda feeling the while for his dagger to plunge it into Edwin's throat. The Mercian had the under hold. A great heave and he raised Edwin off his feet, and for a moment held him there as they say Hercules held Antaeus; then down they crashed together to the earth and rolled over and over on the ground. The ax slipped from Edwin's grasp and Penda seized it.

They tore themselves free and both sprang to their feet. Edwin grasped his dagger and threw himself upon Penda. *Crash!* went the knife against the Mercian's corselet, till he reeled backward and almost fell. Three times the dagger fell on Penda's breast as Edwin strove to reach his throat, but the good chain-mail stood firm, though Penda was frightfully bruised. Once more Edwin came on, but now Penda, recovering himself, stepped aside. He swung the big ax aloft and Edwin's head sprang from his shoulders and rolled twenty feet away, his body fell with a dull thud to the earth and the golden band about his helm, the symbol of his kingship, went rolling up to the feet of Wulfhere.

When the Northumbrians saw their king fall they could be held back no longer. Like a flood, with shouts of anger they poured across the field and met the hosts of advancing Mercians and Britons with a roar. Penda was quickly at the head of his regiments, and Wulfhere led the Hwiccans. The Armoricans fell back before the terrible charge of the Bernicians; the Hwiccans held their ground bravely; the Britons staggered; but the Mercians swept on and on, clearing the Deirans from before them like dust before the broom of the sweeper; then turning in upon the main body of the Northumbrians they made dreadful havoc of their flank.

Always and everywhere Penda in spite of his bruised chest led his men. He seemed to bear a charmed life. Covered with blood from head to foot, it was the blood of those he had slain; not a drop was his own.

What need to tell you more of that great battle, lords? The Northumbrian host lacking their leader broke and fled, leaving half their number dead on the field.

Thus was fought the great battle of Heathfield, on the fourth of the ides of October in the year of our Lord 633. As was the custom in those days Penda took Edwin's head, and the head of Osfrid, his son, with their arms and hands, and putting them on stakes he placed them before the altar that he raised to commemorate the victory, as he had sworn to do. Albeit they were rescued from that indignity by certain daring men of the Northumbrians who came in the night and carried heads and bodies away to York, and afterward buried them under the sanctuary of St. Peter's Church.

Queen Ethelburga hearing of her husband's death took with her her own son and daughter, and accompanied by Paulinus the Archbishop fled by sea to Kent. They took with them, too, the precious vessels of Edwin with a cross of gold and a golden chalice which are in the church at Canterbury to this day. The leaders of the Christian faith, forsaken by their head, Paulinus, forsook the people in their turn, partly because they lost faith in God, and partly because they feared the invader.

The people in their sore strait lapsed most of them into paganism again. Thus did that kingdom which in so short a time became Christian, in shorter time still become pagan again. I blame Paulinus and his priests because they fled in the hour of their people's necessity, leaving their unshepherded sheep to the mercies of the wolves.

Eanfrid the son of Ethelfrid proclaimed himself king of Bernicia, and Osric, cousin to Edwin, declared himself independent sovereign of Deira. Thus were the two provinces of Northumbria, Bernicia and Deira, separated again the one from the other, and knew each a king of its own. Both of these princes had been baptized into the Christian Church—now they became pagan again. They were not long to possess their kingdoms in peace, for both were soon after slain, though whether it was as punishment for their sin of apostasy or no, I know not; God knows in whose hands such things are.

That night—the night of the battle—there came a man reeling into the camp covered with blood and fearful wounds.

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It was Eafa whom we had seen fall before Beorn's sword and whom we had thought dead.

CHAPTER XXX

TWO MAIDS ON THE WALL OF YORK

THOUGH Edwin was dead and his army smitten at Heathfield, Northumbria was by no means conquered yet. A council of war was called after the battle and it was decided that Penda should take his ten thousand remaining men and march northeast to Bebbanburg in pursuit of Eanfrid, while Cadwallo was to march with fourteen thousand of his army northwest, subduing particularly that part of Northumbria that interposed between Strathclyde and Wales. With Wulfhere were left the remaining two thousand Britons which with his own four thousand Hwiccans he was to lead at his own request against Osric, King of Deira.

Straight as the crow flies Penda made toward Bebbenburg, burning and laying waste as he went. Cadwallo loitered on his way to give his men time to plunder and ravish and torture. Cruel as Penda the Pagan was, Cadwallo the Christian was ten times more cruel. Whole towns and villages of inoffensive people were given up to his barbarities. Children were tossed upon the soldiers' spears; the old were burned to death in their houses; the young women were ravished and carried along with the army, not a soldier but dragged at least one at his heels as he marched; the men were butchered in cold blood and put to the most fiendish tortures.

Some the Britons tied to trees to be targets for their knives and spears; some were flayed alive and driven loose into the forest; others were cast off to do for themselves with eyes or tongues pulled out; and others again were mutilated in the vilest fashion. Christians though the Britons claimed to be, they burned whole congregations of English fellow Christians even in their churches. The land was filled with wo and mourning, and those few Northumbrians who remained true to their Christian faith cried——

"Lord, how long, how long?"

Now it was I who had persuaded Wulfhere to get the consent of the kings to let him go up against Osric of Deira.

"Did not the Deirans slaughter thy sister and her mother?" I said. "Go up against them and spare them not. Remember that Peada still hopes to possess Osric's daughter, for he has heard that her beauty is greater than ever. Come now! Go up and take this maiden and bring her to Penda's son, and so win Penda's favor. Wulfhere my old dream came to me again last night. In it I saw the King of Mercia die, and though this part of my visions was dim, yet methought I saw thee with the Mercian scepter in thy hand. Only do as I direct, my son, and thou wilt be King of Mercia some day."

"I do not see how this can ever be," he answered.

"But I can see it!" I exclaimed. "And I swear to thee Wulfhere that mine was no lying vision! Do as I say, my son, if thou lovest me."

"I will do it, my father," he replied, "for thy sake and my sister's, not for the hope of being King of Mercia. That hope seems to me to be impossible to be realized, except that thou art hiding something from me thou dost not see fit to tell."

"Maybe, my son—maybe, but if there is something ask me not to tell it thee now. Trust me, and in due time it will be made known to thee."

He looked at me a moment.

"I knew there was something, my father," he answered, "but thou art wiser than I and I will not ask it of thee. I will speak to the kings."

He did so with the result that with six thousand men he began to prepare for his going. On the third day he set out, and in five days stood with his host before Osric's city, York. It was a walled town and its walls were strong and high. Wulfhere camped before its gates.

And now I want to tell you, lords, of a sad thing that took place there. Wulfhere sent up a challenge to Osric to come out and fight. Now Osric was old, a thing that Wulfhere was ignorant of, else had he not sent him the challenge, but from time to time champions came out of the town to fight on behalf of the king. All these Wulfhere overcame. From time to time also, while engines were being made with which to assail the walls, strong forces of the Deirans issued out and gave battle to the Hwiccans, and always Wulfhere did great deeds of strength and daring against them at the head of his men.

Now Osric had one only daughter, and

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also a foster-daughter, and these two were of the same age. The daughter, Elgiva, was beautiful, with golden hair and sparkling eyes, but the foster-daughter with raven locks and queenly mien was the loveliest woman in all the land. This was she whom Peada desired. This was the same that I wished Wulfhere to take and lead to Penda for his son. Her name was Elflaeda, and ah, lords, she was my daughter, though I knew it not then.

It seems that the story I had heard of her being slain was false; her mother was killed indeed but she escaped and was raised to high honor, first as the companion of Elgiva, Osric's daughter, and then as the adopted daughter of the king. All this I was ignorant of then, and I was scheming to give her into the hands of the son of him who had worked her and me such awful wrong.

Now while the siege of Osric's city continued, these two maidens were wont to climb the tower surmounting the wall at the end of their apartments and watch the combatants. Daily they saw the great form of Wulfhere as he directed his forces or fought at the head of his men. Elflaeda trembled at his prowess, for she feared greatly it meant defeat for her foster-father, and she knew not that this was Wulfhere her brother; but Elgiva the fickle was too light-hearted to think of the wo that threatened them—she only saw in the leader of the besiegers a handsome man, godlike and strong, a very Beowulf in his youth, and she lost her heart to the enemy of her father.

A hateful thing ye will say, lords, for a maid to love the foe of her king, her country, and her father, yet for me I blame her not; I only pity her, poor maid, for to see Wulfhere was to love him and few maids there were who were not ready to give up much they held most dear for his love. Certainly this spoiled, petted daughter whose duty to her own people lay lightly upon her mind was not proof against the attractions of my foster-son.

"Ah, see him, Elflaeda!" she said to her companion as one day they watched the fray. "Behold how brave and handsome he is. See how he mows down men before him! He is as beautiful as Balder and as strong as Thunar!"

"It does not become thee, sister, to praise those who bring wo upon thy people," answered Elflaeda.

"Ah, see now," Elgiva went on, clapping her hands, "he is making for Beornwulf. Ha, they fight! The gods have mercy!" she cried suddenly in fear for Wulfhere as he tripped over the body of a dead soldier and sank to his knee.

"Nay, he is up! Ah, what a mighty arm he has! Behold that great sword swing! Ha, it was well struck! Beornwulf is down!"

"Elgiva, I can not stop and listen to such talk. 'Tis traitorous and wicked. Wouldst rejoice over the fall of one of thy father's bravest warriors?"

"Aye, for I hate him!" she answered. "Did he not come to me and ask my hand after thou hadst refused him? 'Twas insolence. But I forgive him now that he is dead."

Then stretching out her hands toward the field she cried:

"AH, WULFHERE, Wulfhere, come hither to me, Wulfhere, for my whole love, yea, my whole self is thine!"

"What name didst call him? Wulfhere? Is that his name?" Elflaeda cried as with pale face she turned to her sister and sank her fingers into Elgiva's arm, to draw her attention from the field.

"For the love of Frigga, what ails thee?" Elgiva replied. "Thy face is like a sheet. Hast seen a ghost? And why dost thou pinch my arm so? I swear thou hast drawn blood," she declared as she raised the sleeve of her dress to examine the wound.

"Forgive me," Elflaeda said. "I am sorry I hurt thee, but that name recalled past memories. Didst say the name was Wulfhere?"

"Aye, 'tis the name of yonder Hwiccan. What is there in that name to make thee see a ghost and stick thy fingers through my flesh?"

"I had a brother of that name long years ago. If he were still alive he would look like yonder warrior, handsome and strong and tall. But it can not be he," she went on, gazing out with her hand above her eyes, "it can not be Wulfhere my brother, for what had he to do with Hwicce? Moreover he is dead."

"It must be sweet to have a handsome brother," cried Elgiva, who had none of her own.

"But 'tis bitter to lose one," Elflaeda replied.

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"Aye, bitter indeed, my sister. I sorrow for thee, but let us not talk of such things, for what have we to do with death and the dead? Methinks I could not weep even if my own father were dead. I am too young to weep, sister. 'Twould spoil my eyes, then who would call them lovely? T'would wrinkle up my cheeks and take away the roses from my lips, then who would like to press sweet kisses on them? Nay, nay, but I would keep my beauty, yea, and grow more lovely every day for Wulfhere's sake whom I would that some day I could call my husband."

Then stretching out her arms toward the field she cried:

"Ah, Wulfhere, beauteous art thou in thy crested helm and shining shield! What skill and strength is in that arm that hurls the death-dealing javelin! I would I were that javelin to feel the sweet pressure of thy hand. Oh, for wings to fly from this high tower into thy manly arms, to lay my head upon thy breast and call thee 'Love'! Must I grieve and mourn that this dread war against my father and my people works death and havoc on us?

"Nay, but it has brought thee my hero whom else I never should have seen and loved. I would my father might give me as a hostage and pledge of peace, for then I could be thy companion and thy love. Happy is she who bore thee and fondled thee in her arms as I would that I might do; but happier still is she whom thou wilt hold in thy strong arms and call her 'wife'!"

She turned to see if Elflaeda were still near, but finding she had left the tower and gone to her apartments she continued her love-sick meditations.

"I suppose that he must take the city at last. I see not how my father can hold out. If then the gods decree that York must fall, why should Wulfhere's arms and not my love open the gates for him?"

She shuddered and looked around her again as if afraid of her own thoughts.

"Surely it will be better for him to conquer without further slaughter and delay and the expense of more blood of my people, and of his own. Ah, how could I bear to see thee lying cold in death, Wulfhere, my love? And yet this well may happen if this dreadful war goes on much longer. Yes, I will stop this slaughter, I will save my people, and make sure that grim death comes not to thee, Wulfhere.

"But my father—what will he say? He'll call me traitress and cast me off forever. Was ever a maiden in so hard a case? Nay, but this city must fall at last, and if they still hold out my father and my people will all be slain. I will make terms with Wulfhere and deliver up York into his hand, and he will spare my father and my people for love of me. Better this than that they all should die."

She rose from the stone seat and went to her room.

That night Elgiva stole into her father's chamber and from the secret place she took the great key of the city gate. With a rope of hide she and her maid let themselves down from the wall, then in the darkness made their way across the open space to Wulfhere's tent. A sentry challenged her, but when she told him she would see the regent, he led her to the tent door. Inside were two guards with whom she waited till the sentry had delivered the message. At the back of the tent he found Wulfhere with Eanhere his brother, and one of his thanes.

"Show the woman in," Wulfhere ordered, wondering who she could be and what her message.

Soon she was before him, trembling at first because she was afraid, but when she saw his face alight with a gentle smile of welcome her fears fled and her love gave her new courage. He knew she was a maiden by her dress and figure, though her face was hidden by a veil.

"What is thy name, maiden, and what is thy word to me?" he asked as he rose.

"I am the daughter of King Osric and I am come to plead for his life and for the lives of his people," she said.

Wulfhere lifted his eyebrows and came toward her, and taking her hand with great deference and respect he led her to a seat.

"Be seated, lady," he said. "It is not meet that the daughter of a king should stand before rough soldiers such as we. Speak on now, I pray thee."

She felt a thrill pass through her as her hand lay in his.

"Yes, I will do it," she said to herself.

"I am Elgiva the only daughter of King Osric," she repeated. "There is great woe in the city, for the people are starving and all have lost dear ones by this cursed war. The cry of orphans and widows sounds in our ears and there is mourning in every street. I could not bear it longer, Lord of

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Hwicce, and am come here alone without my father's knowledge to plead with thee. Why dost thou war against us? What hurt have we ever done thee? Why wouldst thou slay us?"

"Lady, thou hast done me no harm indeed," Wulfhere answered. "Long years ago two of my people whom I much loved were slain by the Deirans, yet I can not hold this against thee or thy father. Wars, dear lady, are often caused by other things than injuries done, and where there are wars there must needs follow orphans and widows and much sorrow. Northumbria is too great, lady, and Hwicce is too small. We strike to-day at Northumbria that Northumbria strike not at us to-morrow."

"And if we give security to thee that we will never seek to do thee harm or to avenge this war, wilt thou withdraw them from us?"

"What security wilt thou give, lady?" he asked.

"I have heard it whispered that the cause of thy coming hither is to take Osric's daughter. Behold, I am she. Take me now as a pledge of peace between our peoples, and I will dwell as a hostage in thy land."

She threw back her veil and he looked with pleasure on her beauty yet he looked puzzled, too.

"Lady, the fame of thy beauty has gone out into all lands," he said after a moment's pause, "but rumor said thou wert dark, not fair."

"Then rumor lied as rumor often does. I am Osric's daughter and I am fair as thou seest me. Say now wilt thou take me and go thy way?"

Now Wulfhere thought within himself, this was the object of this siege—to take Osric's daughter for Peada. Now he had her, what need of any further strife? He turned to Eanhere who looked on with a puzzled frown.

"Nay, brother," Eanhere answered to his whisper, "there is more in this than appears on the surface. Remember, too, we are here also to take the city."

Wulfhere turned again to Elgiva.

"Lady, it may not be," he said. "A noble thing it is that thou hast done to offer to sacrifice thyself for thy father and his city, but how know we that King Osric would accept thee as surety, even if we did? Besides it were not manly in us to accept so great a sacrifice from a woman. Go back to thy father, and if thou canst persuade him to let thee go into Mercia and there wed Peada, the son of Penda, who has before sued for thy hand, then will I agree to withdraw my army for a time till Penda's will be ascertained. Go now, lady, and I will send a guard with thee."

Now, lords, when she saw that he would not accept her as a hostage, and that her beauty had not prevailed to cause Wulfhere to love her and wish her for his own, she sought to move him by another way. Falling at his feet she poured forth all her love into his amazed ears. She conjured him by his manhood and by all that he held sacred that he should take her for his wife.

"See," she cried, holding up the key of the city gate toward him, "see, I am a castaway and a traitress for the love of thee, for I stole away the city key from my father's side as he slept! Take it, and take me also, Wulfhere!" And she threw the key down at his feet and sought to embrace his knees.

To so great shame had the love of him brought her. Wulfhere drew himself away from her touch as if she had been a serpent.

"Ah, base woman," he cried, "didst think a true man's love could be won by doing for him so base an act of treachery? Know that of all sins treason is the basest and the worst. It damns thee before gods and men! From this time forth thou art an outcast in the world! There is no place among good men for such as thou! Out upon thee, traitress! There is no room for such as thou in Hwicce!"

PAINFULLY and slowly she staggered to her feet as one half-stunned. She rubbed her sleeve across her eyes to brush the tears away, looked at him for a moment, then with bowed head like one in utter misery whose heart was broken, she turned and with her maid staggered out into the night. Not a word of rebuke, only a look of infinite reproach such as the hunter sees in the eye of the stag he is about to slay. Alas, poor crushed and bruised maiden, her happiness was killed indeed.

"Follow her, Eanhere, and see no harm comes to her," Wulfhere said to his friend.

He rose and followed a few paces behind her till she came near the city walls beside the women's tower. She gave a signal and two maids cast down a rope. They pulled her up, also the maid with her, and all

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together disappeared, and Eanhere returned to the tent and told what he had seen.

"Brother, thou wert severe with the damsel," he said. "A love like that deserves a better fate than to be spurned."

"But it was wickedness inspired her to betray her father," said Wulfhere.

"I can not think so, brother; rather it was great love. The deed was wrong, but ah, the love was great. I would I could be loved like that, even I say it who have ever distrusted women. A love that would damn its own soul for the sake of the object loved may be mistaken, but it is great love and to be pitied not despised. She was very beautiful, too, poor maid."

Wulfhere looked at his friend who sat deep in thought.

"Thou hast developed a sudden tenderness, my brother," he said. "I never thought to have seen such feelings inspired in thee by a woman. Dost love this damsel, Eanhere?"

"Nay, brother, mistake me not," he answered quickly, "'tis pity, only pity."

But as Wulfhere stood and watched his friend he thought the seed of something else than pity had begun to grow in Eanhere's heart, and he was sorry for his friend.

"He must not learn to love a traitress," he said to himself. "I must do all I can to cause him to forget her."

All the next day Eanhere spent in the open before his tent, and ever his eyes wandered toward the women's tower. That night before the moon was up, when the stars alone shone in the sky, he went and hid behind a rock by the river's side close to the tower, and there he watched for Elgiva to appear.

What happened in the morning after Elgiva had climbed again into the town was told me by the captain of the king's guard, Oslac, taken prisoner by Wulfhere six days later. Osric's daughter returning toward the walls had been seen by a sentry, who also watched her and her maid as they were pulled up into the town. The same sentry reported to Oslac what he had seen. The maid who accompanied Elgiva was sent for and closely questioned, and fearing death she revealed everything. The matter was laid before the king.

At first he refused to believe the story for he loved and trusted his daughter, but when he had sent for her and she would deny nothing, he cursed her bitterly and bade her go from his presence and never see him more. The burden of her shame and sorrow left her as one dazed, and she walked from the room as one in a dream, and out into the street to her own apartments.

"King, she will do herself some harm," the captain whispered to Osric, "better that one should follow her."

"Aye, go, Oslac," the king said, "follow her, keep thine eye upon her, but lay no hand on her whatever happens." And the old king broke down and wept like a child, for Elgiva had been as the apple of his eye.

That night as the moon was climbing up the heavens, Elgiva left her room and went out into the street closely veiled. She passed down to the wall overlooking the river and climbed it till she stood on a spot just opposite the rock behind which Eanhere lay hid. Oslac followed some fifty paces behind. She climbed the rampart, I say, and stood for a moment with arms outstretched toward Wulfhere's tent and with her veil thrown back. The moon shone full upon her face and Eanhere, watching, saw an agony there that tore his heart-strings.

Then suddenly without a cry she plunged headlong into the river. Oslac reached the rampart in time to see the dark waters close above the unfortunate maiden. Then he saw a shadow dart out of the shadows below and dive into the river close by where Elgiva had fallen, and a dark cloud drifting over the moon obscured his vision and he saw no more. He went back and told the king but said nothing of that shadowy form he had seen plunge noiselessly into the water, for he thought perchance his eyes had deceived him.

Utterly stricken with sorrow and discouraged, Osric two days later rose in the night with his family and his men and fled from the city under cover of the darkness, and Wulfhere knew not he was gone till two days after. He then pursued after him, and came up with the Deiran on the evening of the fourth day after the flight. He found Osric beseiging a town which Cadwallo had taken and which he with a small force was now occupying. Wulfhere attacked Osric there, and Cadwallo made a sally from the town. Osric was slain and his army scattered.

Wulfhere pursued them deep into the forest. He saw two women standing by a rock not far from him. A Hwiccan soldier rushed upon them and smote one down.

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Wulfhere saw it and felled the Hwiccan to the ground with his fist, cursing him for a coward, and the villain slunk away, muttering, into the shadows. Wulfhere turned to the maiden who stood looking on him with her hands clasped. Ah, what a lovely sight that was; surely no mortal woman could be so beautiful. He rubbed his eyes and stared and stared again.

"Say, art thou a spirit or a living woman?" he asked. "If a woman what is thy name and how camest thou here?"

"Ah, soldier," she pleaded, "pity a poor maiden in trouble! See, I am in thy power but hurt me not, do me no wrong! I am daughter to Osric and my father is dead."

"Nay, that can not be," Wulfhere replied, "for Elgiva is Osric's daughter, and she is fair while thou art dark as night."

"I am Elflaeda," she answered, "the foster-daughter of the king. All men call me his daughter."

"Elflaeda! Elflaeda!" he repeated as one in thought. "Tell me now, what was thy real father's name."

"My father's name was Edbert, who lived in Mercia, but alas, now he is dead, he and my mother and my brother Wulfhere," and still she held her clasped hands out to him.

And now Wulfhere knew it was Elflaeda his sister who stood before him.

CHAPTER XXXI

OF THE MEETING OF WULFHERE AND ELFLAEDA

WULFHERE looked long upon her, his heart jumping for joy within him. His whole soul yearned toward his sister and he longed to clasp her in his arms.

"Look at me, Elflaeda," he said sóftly. "Look on me and say who am I."

She looked, then looked again. Something in his face seemed familiar to her. The twilight was beginning to enclose them. She came up nearer and gazed into his eyes, then put her hand over her heart and panted:

"Wulfhere! Wulfhere! My brother who was dead." And she threw her arms about his neck and kissed and clung to him.

"Ah, brother," she wept, "I thought that thou wert dead! I thought that thou wert dead, my brother! Praise God thou art alive, thou whom alone for all these years I have loved and will love even to the end."

He comforted her and kissed her many times, and a great calm filled his soul.

"Tell me," he said after they had talked of many things, "tell me, Elflaeda, hast never loved another?"

"Nay, only thee, Wulfhere."

"But thou art the loveliest woman i' the world, have none ever sought thy love?"

"Yea, many, my brother," she answered, "many of the lords of Deira have asked my hand, but my heart was buried in thy grave, for I thought thee dead, and where my heart was not my hand would never go."

Ah, here was a love surpassing the love of her who had become a traitress to her king, a love as pure and holy as it was deep. Happy the man who can win a love like this.

Then a great dread fell upon Wulfhere.

"Tell me, Elflaeda, was it thy hand that Peada, the son of Penda, sought, or was it thy sister's?" he asked.

"'Twas mine, Wulfhere, 'twas mine, but I thought of thee and I would have none of him."

"Alas, alas," he cried, and covered his eyes with his hands.

"What is it, my brother, tell me what ails thee?" and she strove to draw his hands from his face.

"Listen, Elflaeda! I am sent hither to take thee and deliver thee up to Peada to be his wife."

"My brother, why wouldst thou do this?"

"I knew not, Elflaeda, that Osric's daughter was my own sister. How could I know it? Thou dost not think I would have undertaken this mission had I known? But what can be done, my sister? Canst thou not wed him? He is a king and will rule all Mercia when Penda dies. Thou will be a great queen, Elflaeda, as Peada's wife."

This he said though he hoped in his heart she would not consent to it—he could not bear to give her to any man.

"I can not wed him, brother, I can not," and she clung to Wulfhere and wept. "Ah, give me not up! Is there no way, is there no way?"

He thought a long time, then answered.

"There is Elgiva, thy sister."

"But she is dead, she died for love of thee, Wulfhere. Poor maid, she found peace in the waters of the river."

"Nay, Eanhere, my blood-brother, saw her fall and plunged in after her and drew

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her out half-dead. She is being nursed back to life by a Hwiccan woman, and under a guard of soldiers is even now being borne on a stretcher hither."

"My brother, now I see a way whereby thou mayest save me!" cried Elflaeda eagerly. "Give Elgiva to Peada. She is very beautiful and she is the daughter of Osric. Moreover, because of her act of treachery she is a castaway, cursed by her father and scorned by her people. She has no longer any home. None here will receive her. It were a mercy to give her to Peada, for then she would be a queen, she who is now an outcast. Perchance Peada may love her."

"I think another has learned to love her, even Eanhere, but I would not have him wed her. This will be a way to save him from her. Yes, she must go to Peada instead of thee. But in the meantime how are we to hide thee, my sister? Till Elgiva is wed to Peada thou must lie hidden."

"There is a sisterhood near here," she said. "I know the abbess. 'Twas she who won me to her faith. I will go thither and hide me there till Elgiva is wed, then come to thee."

"Where is this sisterhood, Elflaeda?"

"Nay, thou must not know. Trust me, my brother, I will be with thee in good time. See, I know the way and must travel there alone. Fear not for me, I shall be quite safe. Now let me throw my cloak about this maid. She is dark like me, and all will think me dead finding her body here."

She stooped down to look on her dead maid's face.

"Ah, wicked war and brutal men, that fight like beasts and slay even helpless women," she cried. "Poor Hilde, God rest thy soul!"

She put her robe about the body of the maid. Her necklet and armlets, and her ring also she left with the body, and buckled the dead woman's cloak about her own shoulders.

"I hear the tramp of feet," she whispered suddenly. "They come this way. It must not be known here that I still live. Adieu, my brother."

She threw her arms about Wulfhere's neck and kissed him passionately, then before he could stop her she was gone. He made as if to follow her but soldiers burst in among the trees where he was standing and came toward him. They dragged along with them that same captain who told me the story of Elgiva whom he had followed to the ramparts from which she had plunged into the stream. They had taken him prisoner, and now finding Wulfhere they led their captive before him.

"Oslac, come hither and look on this maiden, and tell me who is she," Wulfhere ordered.

Oslac, the Deiran captain, stepped forward, and as he stood looking on the body Wulfhere severed with his knife the thongs that bound his arms and hands.

The Deiran stooped down to examine more carefully.

"The robe and the hair are Elflaeda's, Osric's foster-daughter, as are also the necklet and ring. I can not make out the features. It was a coward's blow that smote the maiden in the face," he said.

"A coward's blow indeed," returned Wulfhere. "I smote the Hwiccan in the face and knocked him down with my fist. I would I had used my sword on him."

"I fear it is the body of Elflaeda, the fairest maiden in Northumbria, aye, or in all England," said Oslac.

"Dig a grave and bury the maid," ordered Wulfhere. "My heart grieves me that she is dead."

They made a grave there, Wulfhere watching them, and reverently laid the body in it with its rich robe and Elflaeda's golden necklet and armlets and ring untouched, then piled the earth upon it. When all was done Wulfhere turned to Oslac.

"Deiran, if I know men thou art an honest one and a brave one. With this thane's good will who captured thee I bid thee go thy way, for thou art free; or if against his will then I will pay him the full ransom."

"Nay, let him go, I will have no ransom for him," the thane said.

"Good! Go now, Oslac."

But Oslac kneeled on one knee before Wulfhere, and putting his hands in Wulfhere's hands, he answered:

"Noble Hwiccan, whither can I go? I have no home, no people any more; our cause is lost. Henceforth I am thy man, ready to make war with thee on all except Deirans."

"I thank thee, Oslac," Wulfhere answered, "and accept thee as my man. My

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mission against thy people now is over. Never again will I make war upon them. It may be, Oslac, that some day I may be able to strike a blow for them against their foes. I feel it in my heart that it will be so. It may be that perhaps I then shall make atonement for the wrongs that lately I have helped to work upon them."

"In that day, Regent of Hwicce, Oslac will lay down his life for thee," cried the Deiran, grasping Wulfhere's hand.

THEY went silently back to the city, and there found a scene of great confusion. Drawn up before the gates was a band of Deiran prisoners, perhaps two hundred of them, their arms bound to their sides. It seems that Cadwallo was superintending the execution of them, for several bodies with heads shorn off lay about the sand, and a huge executioner leaned upon his sword.

Eanhere was standing before the king shaking his ax at him and shouting angry words of protest. Cadwallo only sneered at him and ordered another victim to be led forward, but before the great sword could swing for the stroke Eanhere's ax was buried in the skull of the executioner. This is what had caused the commotion. Cadwallo had just ordered that Eanhere be seized, but all feared to come within range of Blood Ax.

As Wulfhere strode up Cadwallo came toward him, demanding that Eanhere be bound and punished. A violent quarrel arose between them, during which Cadwallo in his rage used the words "slave" and "vassal." Wulfhere went up to him and smote him on the mouth.

"Get thee gone, base murderous Briton!" he cried. "Henceforth I fight with the Deirans to drive thee out of this land."

Cadwallo muttered terrible threats of vengeance. He ordered his trumpet to be sounded, and having gathered his men about him, together with those he had placed in Wulfhere's charge, he marched away. Some of the Britons would have forced Deiran maidens along with them, as it was their custom to carry the women of the conquered along to minister to their wants and passions. Wulfhere commanded that not a captive should accompany them, and they went their way with empty hands, grumbling out curses and dire threats.

When they had gone Wulfhere ordered that all the prisoners should be set free. Their bonds were cut, and with Oslac at their head they knelt before Wulfhere and placed their hands in his hands.

"God has sent thee, lord," cried Oslac, "to deliver our people from that wolf Briton. We are as sheep without a shepherd; lead us, lord, and help us in our sore trouble to drive out our foes, and all my people will bless thee."

The others pleaded also that he should lead them against Cadwallo.

"The whole land groans under his awful cruelties," they said, "and even now he has but gone to join the main part of his army, and will come again to rend us like a wolf."

"How can ye ask me to lead you, me who have slain your people and made many widows in your land?" Wulfhere asked.

"We will pardon all that if thou wilt only deliver us now," they cried.

Wulfhere thought for a moment, then answered.

"It would seem, Deirans, that I can not refuse you even if I would. I have made an enemy of Cadwallo who is mightier than I. When he has destroyed you then he will turn and destroy me. Better that we should fight together against him, for then we might have some chance; alone we have none. Besides, I weary of his awful cruelties, and I swear by the gods to make him suffer for them. Come now, will ye follow me to the death against him?" And he raised his voice aloud so that all could hear.

"We will follow thee to the death!" they cried.

"It is well," he went on; "now let your chief men come with me to my tent, for we must plan what we must do, and quickly."

Oslac and three others followed him. Eanhere also joined them and several Hwiccan thanes. Brian and his men Wulfhere had sent back to Worcester ten days before, for he distrusted Peada, and felt that he might make an attempt on Hwicce during their absence.

He sat with the chiefs far into the night. Cadwallo's army he learned was far away to the west and north ravaging and destroying. It would be perhaps a month before their king could join them and return. In the mean time the Deiran chiefs must collect their scattered forces,

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and with the Hwiccans join themselves to Oswald, the Bernician, who, now that Osric was dead, was the only hope of the Northumbrian nation, and who had a small force farther north. Then they would give battle to Cadwallo.

East and west and south messengers were sent to the head men of villages and towns to collect their warriors and hasten to Wulfhere's banner. A messenger also set out to find Oswald in the north, and as the days went by bands of men began to enter the town. More and more came, a band or two each day, till with the Hwiccans full seven thousand men were gathered. On the third week came Oswald with two thousand men, and hearty was the greeting that he gave Wulfhere, and great friends they became. For Oswald was a saintly man, a lover of the Christ, and of the Christ he talked full often with Wulfhere, till the latter felt his heart warm toward the Christians' God.

Wulfhere had long since ceased to worship Thunar and Woden, though, as I have said before, he still swore by them, yet he had never joined the Christians, for like Penda he had felt that Christ's religion, though good for women, was not for men. Now under Oswald's teaching he learned to see that the virtues which Christ taught and which Penda and he despised were beautiful and godlike. Humility, faith, patience, love, forgiveness—how was it he had not seen the beauty and the grandeur of these virtues long ago? Wulfhere was half a Christian when he marched two weeks later with Oswald to meet Cadwallo on Heavenfield.

They met him with a force but half his own. They smote him hip and thigh and scattered him like chaff before the wind. With grim determination they pursued the Briton. Slain was Cadwallo; all his captains too were slaughtered. Welsh blood soaked the ground for many a mile, and Welsh bones strewed the forests for many a year thereafter. At the beginning of the battle Oswald planted a holy cross before his host. He caused his men to kneel and pray the God of heaven to help them in the righteous war they were waging against a proud and cruel enemy for the safety of their country.

Then, having said their prayer, they joined battle with the Britons. Behind Cadwallo's army flowed a stream called Denis-burn, which stream was filled with the corpses of the Britons. That place King Oswald called thereafter "Heavenfield," because of the help that Heaven gave him there.

After the fight, as the evening drew on, Oswald and Wulfhere walked out over the field of battle.

"I thank thee, brother of Hwicce," Oswald said, "for the help that thou hast given our poor country. To God belongs the honor of the victory, but after God the honor belongs to thee. Never have I seen such a fighter as thou. Ah, with a score like thee I should not fear to meet even Penda, who like a lion goeth through our land devouring and destroying. The wolf is dead—now for the lion. Say, brother, art thou with us still? Wilt help to drive the lion out?"

NOW Wulfhere longed to answer "Yea," for his heart spoke so within him; and ever he obeyed his heart; but in fighting against Penda would he not be fighting me, his foster-father? Had he not promised me he would carry out the plan I urged upon him though his heart was not in it, namely, to take Osric's daughter and deliver her to Peada to gain great Penda's favor? All this he explained to Oswald.

"Help me now to fulfil my vow to Edbert," he said, "and when I have done it I am with thee, King."

Oswald stroked his beard and shook his head. How could he agree to send a Deiran princess to be wife to an enemy of his country?

Wulfhere called Oslac to him.

"Tell the king the story of Elgiva, the daughter of Osric, for I can not," he said, and Oslac told the story.

"If she were still alive I think I could agree to thy proposal, Wulfhere," Oswald said, "for it is better that she should live like a queen in Mercia than a dishonored outcast here; but Oslac says she is dead."

"She was saved from the waters," Wulfhere replied. "Eanhere, my brother plunged after her and drew her out, and even now she is here with us, cared for by a Hwiccan woman."

Oslac lifted his eyebrows in astonishment.

"I saw a shadow fall from the bank into the stream beside the place where the poor

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maid sank, but the moon was hidden by a cloud just then and I could see nothing further. I thought my eyes must have deceived me. I am glad the maid was saved," he said.

Oswald told Oslac of Wulfhere's proposal, and, he favoring it, the king agreed that if she would comply of her own free will she should be delivered to Peada. They went all three to Eanhere's tent to talk the matter over with him. Bitterly he opposed the plan, and from that day there began to grow a breach between Wulfhere and him, a breach that widened as the time went by, to Wulfhere's bitter sorrow.

"She was the daughter of an enemy. I rescued her," he said, "took her captive, if you will, and she is mine. I defy you to take her from me!" he roared, drawing Blood Ax from his belt, his eyes blazing with fury.

Wulfhere looked sadly on his brother.

"Eanhere, for this purpose and this alone came we to this place to make war on Osric. My promise, man, think of my vow to Edbert!"

"Thy vows be ——! What care I for thy vows, thou false friend!" Eanhere shouted. "Draw thy sword and fight for her if thou wilt have her!"

Wulfhere knew it was useless to reason with his friend while in that frame of mind, as useless as to try to persuade a lion to hand over his mate to another lion.

"Come, let us go," he said to Oswald, and together they turned to leave the tent.

"Stop, King!" Eanhere shouted. "We will let the lady herself decide."

Oswald followed him into the tent of Elgiva, which was next his own. They found her lying on a couch, the picture of sorrow. King Oswald greeted her kindly, asking her how she did, but she only looked vacantly at him and answered nothing.

"Forgive our interruption, lady," said Eanhere softly, "but the king here has come to speak to thee of a certain matter."

"Lady, I have heard thy story," Oswald began, "and I judge thee not. Let him who is without sin cast the first stone at thee. There are happy days still ahead of thee. There is one who seeks to make thee his wife—one in high place."

Here she raised her head quickly and looked in mute appeal at Oswald.

"Who is he?" she asked hoarsely.

"A king, lady—Peada of Mercia."

"Ah!" she sighed, and sank down again on the couch holding her forehead with her hand.

"He would make thee his queen, Elgiva. Honored and happy shalt thou be in a land where they know naught of thy sin."

"There is no more happiness left for me in this world," she said mournfully. "I long only to be the bride of death."

"Say not so, lady," the king continued. "Peada wishes thee for his wife. He is a king, and they tell me—a Christian. He had a wife who taught him the love of God, but she is dead. The faith of Christ which he professes will comfort thee in thy sorrow. This our request of thee is urgent, lady. The Regent of Hwicce before he came hither vowed a vow that he would deliver thee to Peada. He can not break his vow; moreover, he can not aid our stricken land further till that vow be fulfilled. For the sake of thy land and thy people, lady, do what we ask, by so doing thou wilt make atonement for thy sin, and the curse of thy father will be taken from off thee."

She made as if to answer when Eanhere interrupted her.

"Lady, it is not meet that thou shouldst be asked to sacrifice thyself that so foul an oath may be fulfilled," he declared earnestly. "Wicked and cowardly was the promise to deliver up a fair young maid to the rough mercies of an enemy of her people. A shameful oath I say it was. Think twice then before saying 'yea' to it."

He threw himself on his knees by her couch.

"See! I who saved thee from a watery grave—rough and unworthy though I be—I love thee, Elgiva, with all my soul and power. Wilt thou not take me, lady, for good or ill? Say 'aye,' and vow or no vow I'll carry thee to another land far from these scenes of thy sorrow, and there my every thought will be to make thee happy. Lady, I am the son of a king, unworthy though I may be of thee. For thy sake I will defy the power of Mercia and Hwicce, and will shake my fist in the face of all those who make war on women. Choose now between Peada and myself, but ah, choose me, Elgiva."

Sorrowfully she regarded him.

"Rise up, Eanhere," she said. "Thou art a good man and I thank thee for thy

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kindness. To choose thee would mean sorrow and shame for thee, and I would spare thee that. Wouldst love a maiden whose love was given to another? Nay, it can not be.

"My Lord King," she continued, addressing Oswald, "there is a mistake. It was another the Peada sought, not me. Perhaps the regent has not told thee all the tale, but no doubt he has his reasons. Nevertheless, I will go. It matters not that a poor maiden be sold to an enemy, so men's vows be kept. I am ready to go to Mercia. It may be that my country will not think so ill of me henceforth. To-morrow I will be ready. Please leave me now."

Oswald thanked her and left the tent, and Eanhere went out after him, sore at heart and inwardly wondering what she could have meant in saying that there was a mistake, that Peada had not sought her in marriage and that Wulfhere had his reasons for not telling all the tale. There was something at the bottom of it all. His friend was hiding something from him, but he would search it out. His heart turned hard toward his blood-brother, who, for the sake of a rash vow, would take away his love.

TO BE CONCLUDED

Author of "The Death of Zari," "No Evidence," etc.

OUTSIDE the rude shack the blizzard raged with a fury known only to the desolate lands of the Canadian Northwest. At times it seemed as if the storm would lift the hut from its foundation. The two men shivered and drew themselves up closer to the red-hot stove.

They sat for a while without speaking, one—the elder—calmly smoking and the other restlessly fingering the paper he held in his hands.

"How long did you say the provisions would hold out?" he blurted at length.

"Say twenty days—twenty-five at the most," drawled the other. "But that 'ud mean mighty short rations—a cracker or two a day—that's all."

The other read the rude scrawl on the paper he held in his hands.

> Strangers, make yourself at home. They ain't much grub but you are welcome to what there is. I'll be back with more inside a couple of months.
> PETE.

"He's been gone about three weeks?"

"Yep."

"Can't we possibly make the settlement?"

"It's a fortnight's hard packing at the best of times. But now—" the elder man

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shrugged his shoulders— "it's impossible."

"And Pete won't be back for another five weeks."

"That's how I reckon it," assented the other.

"—— it! We would have been safe at the post by now if you hadn't insisted on coming round by Pete's."

"I calculated it would be sort of easier going for you this way. I didn't figure on Pete being away, sonny," said the other gently.

"Well, now you have got to figure on us being dead a month by the time he gets back. Yes, dead of starvation! Do you hear me?"

His voice rose to a breaking pitch and, pushing back his chair, he rose to his feet and walked restlessly about the room.

On the table lay a pack of greasy cards. They arrested his attention and he halted beside them. Picking them up he began to shuffle them absent-mindedly.

"There's no need for us both to die," he said suddenly.

The other looked up.

"No?"

"No. There's enough food for one, isn't there?"

"As I figure it, there is."

"Then let's cut the cards. The high man stays with all the food; the other goes out. Are you game?"

"I was about to suggest something like that myself."

"Well, come on then," said the other impatiently.

"What shall it be? Best out o' three?"

"No. Why prolong the agony? One cut and ace counts low."

The elder man rose from his chair and walked to the table.

"The two of spades," he said as he cut the cards. "I reckon I go. I'd like to get real warm first though," and he walked back to the stove.

"Wait. See what I get. Ace counts low you know."

With shaking hands he cut the cards; then, as if by accident, allowed them to drop from his hands.

"Yes, you go!" he cried excitedly. "It was the king of hearts. It's up to you, old-timer. I'm sorry——"

He seemed overanxious to have the other depart.

The elder man rose to his feet.

"Good-by, sonny, and good luck. I hope Pete's on time. As for me, I was always unlucky at cards."

He walked slowly toward the door but paused at the sound of the other's voice.

"Have you any tobacco, old-timer? I— You won't need any and I——"

He stopped in confusion.

"No, I won't need it," and taking a bag of tobacco and a package of cigaret papers from his pocket, he threw them on the table.

"Good-by."

"Good-by."

The door opened and a wild flurry of snow entered as if threatening to turn the hut into a place of desolation.

The door closed and for a while all was still.

Then came a report like a revolver shot or perhaps the snapping off of a tree-limb. And again all was still save for the wailing of the storm.

The man who was left rolled a cigaret, clumsily, for the middle finger of his right hand was missing.

He picked up the card he had dropped from his cut. It was the ace of spades.

With a bitter smile on his face he lit his cigaret and waited for the return of Pete— and life.

THE heat was overpowering. It seemed as if the heat of the long tropical day was concentrated in the tiny thatched hut. Winged, evil-smelling insects flew around the flickering candle; red, hairy spiders ran up and down the wall and in the grass roof a stealthy rustle betokened the presence of a snake.

The monotonous drone of myriads of mosquitoes filled the air, while ever and anon could be heard a deeper note—the beating of the war-drums. Mingled with the sonorous note of the drums were the lustful shouts of bloodthirsty natives.

The two white men looked at each other appraisingly.

"Well, what do you think, Simpson? Do they mean business?"

"——, yes, man! The Barotse nigger doesn't play the war-drum for fun. They are out for blood—yours and mine—and they'll get it. I haven't been trading up here all these years to know nothing about the wily nigger. They let you through today to add to the fun."

"But what have they against us?"

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"That's a —— foolish question! Nothing. There doesn't have to be any reason why the Barotse goes on the war-path."

"Well, we can hold 'em off. They haven't got guns; that's one consolation."

"No, but they have got spears and know how to use 'em. And how long, Jones, do you think it 'ud be before they set the place on fire? Not long. Then it wold be a case of burn like rats in a trap or run out to get stuck like a pig."

"You're a cheerful sort of cuss."

"There's nothing particularly cheerful about it, is there? In another couple of hours, more or less, the sun will be up. Then they'll rush us. They like to do their work in the daylight."

"Well, can't we make a bolt for it?"

"How far do you think we'd get before they got on our trail? Make up your mind that they're guarding us pretty closely, as you'd soon find out if you ventured far from the hut."

"But no one's been near here since I arrived."

"That's no odds. You can bet your life that not all of the niggers are down at the big *indaba*. Some are doing sentry-go round this neighborhood.

"Little darlings, aren't they?" he added ironically as the chanting sounded louder. "It's a pity you don't speak the lingo. They're singing about the tender way they're going to treat us later on."

A horse neighed outside the hut.

"What's to hinder us getting away on my horse?" asked Jones. "They haven't touched him yet. Let's double up—it's a bare chance."

"A pretty slim one, I'll say. Here you weigh nearly two hundred pounds and I go a little over. Your nag 'ud founder before he started."

The other thought for a moment.

"Well, Simpson," he said at length, "you take my horse and try to get away. There's no sense in both of us being killed."

"That's true enough, but it's your horse. Go to it—I won't."

"But——"

"No, I won't. That's final!"

Again they were silent and again Jones was the first to speak.

"Look, Simpson," he said angrily. "I haven't got the nerve to sit here and wait for those black devils to come up here and stick me, especially when I know that one of us could get safely away. On the other hand, I'm hanged if I'm going to ride off coolly and leave you to face the music alone. Have you any cards?"

Simpson produced a pack of greasy cards.

"I often play solitaire when I'm lonely. Want to play?"

Jones shook his head impatiently.

"No. Look here, we'll draw cards—ace counts high—to see who'll take a chance on my nag. High goes; low stays. You draw first."

"All right," grunted Simpson. "But you might as well go now. I'm always unlucky at cards."

"Go on, draw, man. You're wasting time."

"Ten of diamonds," said Simpson, showing his card.

Jones drew a card, looked at it and, crumpling it up in disgust, threw it on the floor.

"The eight of spades," he said. "Good-by Simpson, and good luck."

"Good-by, Jones. Don't let 'em take you alive. Keep a shot for yourself. ——, but I hate to leave you like this!"

"Oh, get out! Don't waste any more time. So-long."

"S'long."

The door of the hut opened and the shouts of the warriors sounded piercingly on the night air. The heavy reek of jungle sweat stung Jones' nostrils.

The door closed and all was still save for the threatening roar of the war-drums.

Then Jones, the man who was left, rolled a cigaret clumsily, for the middle finger of his right hand was missing.

He picked up the card he had thrown on the ground and straightened it. It was the ace of spades.

Then, with a calm smile on his face, he lighted his cigaret at the flickering candle and waited composedly for dawn—and death.

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MUD

by

Romaine H. Lowdermilk

Author of "The Spirit of His Youth," "Three Wise Men," etc.

"HEY, doc! Come see what we got!" There was a commotion without my tack-room. The door was kicked violently open. I rolled over in my blankets and looked out. The morning sun had scarcely topped the track-fence, but despite the dim light and the fact that little gusts of chilly Fall breezes blew oat-chaff along the floor and into my face I could see we were in trouble—again.

"Well, drag out an' do somethin'," Al, my partner, was blaring. "Behold ol' Major Action." Al indicated with a wave of his hand our big gelding. "What'ju think of that?"

"Bowed tendon," I replied from my blankets.

"Astonishing perspicacity," commented Al, sitting down in the doorway and gazing gloomily at Major's right foreleg where, between ankle and knee, showed the unmistakable swelling. "Fine horse f'r you to practise on, anyhow—always something wrong."

Having pulled on my trousers and shoes, I went out and examined the injury.

"Must 've strained that yesterday in the mile," I suggested.

"Didn't look to me like he was strainin' anything," grunted Al. "Looked to me like he was huntin' a place to lay down an' roll."

"Track's too fast; ol' Maje wants mud. Give him mud and he'll show speed like he did last Spring. Remember down in Orleans?"

Al Cowan sniffed.

"Well, doc, cure 'im up," he grumbled. "You're the great physician of this firm an' it's up to you to keep the fast string on its feet. I'll make it a point to tell 'Little Joe' to hold Maje's head up when they pass the water-trough; ol' Maje might want to stop an' take a drink as they come down the stretch sometime."

I returned to the tack-room for the liniment. As I brought forth the familiar bottle old Major reared, dragging Al out of the doorway.

"Whoa!" Al yelled. "Say, doc, I got an idee! Nex' time Maje starts have somebody run out with the liniment-bottle just as the barrier flys up. Maje'll get off in fine shape. He'll cop, sure. Whoa, Maje! Whoa!"

I sidled up cautiously and grabbed the leg.

"Whoa, Maje," I seconded.

Major struggled momentarily, then stood patiently. Old Maje knows we know what's best for him.

"Had a chance to sell Maje yesterday," stated Al.

"What!"

"Yeah. Rich little second lootenant wants a flash saddler. I showed him Maje. That was before the run yesterday an' Maje was walkin' on air. Little dudie was

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plumb satisfied. I told him Maje was only a colt, remarked his showy light-bay color and the white stockin' feet. I called him a Herkshire saddler thoroughbred, a spirited mount and a knobby—I said knobby—stepper."

I laughed. Old Maje snorted in amazement.

"Sure thing—knobby. Just look, doc: Beginnin' with the left front hoof we have knob number one—side-bone. Then going up we see a slight wind-puff—knob number two. Next signs of a sprained ligament—number three. Passing on, ladies and gents, is the remains of the Latonia splint and the Saratoga shoulder, the——"

"Call 'em back!" I interrupted. "How about this lieutenant? Has he got the money? And how much will he part with?"

"For this knobby steed? For this unparalleled liniment saturator? This swiftly stepping ailment advertisement? Hah, leave it to me. I told him this bird was entered for the Copper Mile next Saturday and that if the gallant young gelding failed to cop we would part with him for a trifle like three hundred and thirty-eight dollars. But if, on the other hand, he win, it would take the exchequer entire."

"What'd he think about buying a racehorse for a saddler?"

"Didn't think. I never saw a second loot who could think. Your pardner, Al, did all the thinkin'. I showed him just why he'd need such a steed and that was all there was to it. He'll buy this bottle-shaped bay rum blotter at our own price."

"Well, then, why not price him at three forty, or even fifty? Where's your business sense, Al? Tell me that."

"Why?" Al raised his brows superiorly. "Why? Ah, my man, that price is a bargain price marked down from four hundred, which is less than thrice what the article is worth. Moreover, my medicinal friend, that three thirty-eight will exactly pay us up and out on the coming Saturday which, to us on the inside, will be known as the last day of the Phœnix Fair and the last day's racing we will enjoy this season. Phœnix, Arizona! Believe me, doctor, I want to inquire how happens it we're here contributing to all the purses and getting in on none of 'em.'

"Been running all Summer. Too long a season. This late meeting may be all right for the harness crowd, but for us who started off last April we're getting in too much of a heat."

"Last April did you say?"

"Sure, don't you remember anything?"

"Yeah, I seem to. Must have started early in the month, though—'bout the first day, eh? April first, that's the date for us."

"Great. Say, Al, you ought to be back with Burley's Burlesquers. They pulled that stuff green in 1883."

"Guess you're right," mused Al. "I'd better go back into the show business if we're goin' to get the dough to support us an' our fast stable through the Winter. The cr-r-uel Winter cometh apace, doctor, the three thirty-eight we get from the loot on Saturday— maybe—will clear us and also clean us. The Winters may not be severe down here in Arizona, but, doc, they do say the grass along the roadsides freezes and frosts, and then where'll our Winter pastures be?

"That tack-room is pretty good sleepin' now, but a fat chance we got to Winter here with only the liniment bottle for succor. We're here with our string of three noble racing-horses that with even the great Elbert Tondy up, and he's the best jock rider on this earth today, he couldn't herd a one of 'em in close enough to see the finish with glasses. Let's sell out an' buy a farm."

"Oh, any little thing'd suit me," I replied, "a couple million dollars, a farm or a gold mine or any such small favor. Why, Al, here you are talking about buying a farm when you couldn't buy a chigger off one of these farms in chigger season. Better go and put some hurry-up dope on Jazzabell an' some on Little Joe, too, if we're to look in at that quarter-mile this afternoon. Seem like we'd oughta show once in a while anyhow"

"Oh, ought to! Absolutely! Especially when the whole speedy string looks like a 'before taking' advertisment for horse medicine."

"Let's take Maje over to his room an' let him eat. I see where I get the jolly little job of bathing this ligament till after everybody's had dinner. Cold water's the dope, Al, cold water and vinegar an' salt an' everything else that's handy."

"Bet he chokes or jams his jaw-bone inside twenty minutes. That's Maje's limit without a new crack—twenty minutes. Never saw him run since we got him outa

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the mud down at New Orleans last Spring, but what something busted.

"Well, he's a mudhorse, that's all."

"Well, we come to a durn poor place lookin' for mud, we did. Arizona! There ain't been any mud here since the flood."

AS WE moved toward Major's stall a dapper figure appeared up the long row. Al nudged me.

"That's him."

Mechanically Al's hand commenced the military salute. Al stopped it half-executed and greeted the trim young officer with a careless "hello."

"Good morning," replied the little lieutenant crisply and with an inflection calculated to put Al in his place.

"Oh, pshaw!" commented Al. "Every time I see one of the shave-tails I'm almost ashamed to admit I spent eighteen months in the army.

"Oh." The other raised his brows interestedly. "And you have been in the service?"

The way he said service would make you think it was the name of a pretty girl he was just about to kiss.

"Yeah, bo!" exclaimed Al fervently. "Been in the sair-viss. You said it there. An' I been there as a private, too. They do say these looties have more sense than the general run of privates but I got my doubts. I got my discharge last Spring after nine months in France an' I haven't had my uniform on since. Now here you come wound up in karki an' leather like there was still war goin' on amongst these here stables."

"You were across?" inquired the lieutenant politely. "I didn't have the honor myself. All the good men, you know——"

Al gaped.

"You bet I was across," he growled, "an' I was a brave soldier, too. I carried the drum and whenever I sighted the enemy—I beat it."

"Burley's Burlesquers," I hastened to explain. "Al used to be in the show business an' this is a sort of a hang-over. He's sore today anyhow; don't pay any attention to him."

"Oh, say," laughed the lieutenant, "but about this horse——"

"I was in the big fight when we captured the Argonne woods," persisted Al, "an' just as we made our initial charge into the timber and received the first volley of shot from the enemy, General Pershing came riding furiously over to where I was. 'Private Cowan,' says he, 'are you hurt?' 'No, sir,' says I. 'Then,' says he, 'in that case we'll let the battle go on.' And it went on. And there was I boldly fighting for three days—first on one side and then on the other."

I sighed and winked at the lieutenant.

"Indeed," ejaculated that person interestedly. "But how about this horse. I'd like to——"

"In a minute, loot," Al put him off grandly. "You see you missed the big show an' I'm telling you about it. I am very patriotic; I revere the Stars and Stripes; I love to rally around the grand old American Flag. Why, I was willing to leave the thickest of the battle several times, just to go to the rear and rally around it. And I was about the bravest man in the whole conflict. Why, everybody said I was the coolest man in the whole Eighty-ninth Division—and I was, too, I shivered all the time."

"Burley's Bur—" I started to apologize for Al's conduct. "Burley's Burl—Burb—"

But Al had begun again:

"And finally, loot," Al was saying, "finally General Pershing called me and the rest of the Army up before him and he says: 'Men, we're to make a final charge. Be brave and courageous and strike out for honor, glory, home and native land.' I struck out for home and native land. And just as I got well outside the line of battle on my way to safety one of those terrible Huns jumped up out of a shell-hole. He pulled out a long trench-knife. I cocked my rifle, fixed my bayonet, took the lead—an' kept it."

"And when you passed headquarters they couldn't tell whether you'd brought in your prisoner or he'd chased you in, so they locked you both up. I've heard all that before——"

"Yes, Burley's Burlesquers, in 1883," I offered.

"Well, now," purred Al. "You are human after all, ain't yuh? Glad to know you, lootie. Are you ever goin' to lay aside the unie or are you growed fast inside it?"

"I think I shall discard this uniform next Saturday," the lieutenant replied coolly.

"But about this horse," I hurried to say, "Al said he'd offered Maje for three thirty-eight——"

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"Yes, but since that time," ejaculated Al, "he's devoured a bale of hay, demolished half a sack of oats and dispensed with eleven buckets of water——"

"—and diminished the visible supply of liniment by about a quart," finished the lieutenant, glancing at Major's annointed limbs.

"All of which," continued Al unperturbed, "cometh to two dollars and twenty-five cents extra."

"Fair enough," replied the other. "He'll be just the thing for my wife to ride—or myself. I'd like to take him with me this morning."

With that the lieutenant drew out a neat little roll about the caliber of a French 75.

"He's entered in the Copper Mile, the big ten-thousand-dollar race on Saturday," bargained Al. "He's sure to win. Elbert Tondy's comin' out here just special to ride him. We'd better keep him till after."

"Elbert Tondy!" exclaimed the lieutenant.

"Sure, him. He's the best jockey on earth and of course he'd sooner or later want to ride Maje, here."

"Naturally," smiled the lieutenant "My uncle, Bill Coburn, who has an interest in these Coburn horses, knows Tondy and perhaps he can get him to ride for me—provided of course you'll sell me the horse now. Really, I'd like to own a race-horse that was actually running in a race." The lieutenant smiled winningly. "Suppose I give you back your entrance-money along with your price?"

"Guess so," hesitated Al. "Seems fair on the face of it."

And it was, too, considering we hadn't entered up yet.

"Easy money," grinned Al after the lieutenant had led Major away. "That's the way to handle 'em. Act like you didn't care whether you sold the horse or not and they'll fall all over themselves to hand you more money than you ever had in your life. With Maje off our hands there's Jazzabel for the dashes and Vanity for the distance, with a chance to show in anything— Hey, hold on!" Al yelled after the retreating lieutenant. "Wait a minute."

Al disappeared in the direction of our tackle-room and returned with the liniment-bottle, which he passed over to Major's new owner.

"This goes with the horse. Apply liberally."

"Thank you," replied the little lieutenant easily, "I thank you."

And he accepted the bottle.

SATURDAY, the last day of the fair and the biggest day of the meeting, dawned atmospherically as perfect a day as the previous ones had been. Yet horses were not being exercised on the track. Instead, drags were busy trying to get the track in shape for the widely advertised Copper Mile running-race for the purse of ten thousand dollars. The trouble with the track on this fair morning was mud.

Mud!

Something had happened to the irrigating-system by which the infield was kept green and the lawns turfed. A ditch, flowing perhaps four hundred miners' inches of water, had been diverted during the night so that it flooded and completely saturated four-fifths of the track, including the stretch.

The only part not ankle-deep in rich adobe mud was a portion of the first quarter.

This occasion was apparently accidental, a wooden head-gate having been knocked out, presumably by the steers used in the cowboy sports and contests, these steers being permitted to graze the infield and feed at the great stacks of alfalfa placed beyond the track for that purpose. Some of these steers had apparently got into an altercation over the deeper, clearer water at the gate and, in settling the dispute, had horned one of their number through the wood, thereby releasing a flood of water sufficient to inundate the entire track, had not one of the watchmen discovered the out-of-place flood and hastened to repair the breach.

Even with rapid repairs the track was a ruin from a racing standpoint. Yet, since the weather was fair, there seemed to be no way to prevent the outpouring crowds which by two o'clock jammed the grand stands, entertained by the cowboy sports in the infield—a wild panorama of bucking horses, bellowing steers and daring riders and ropers.

To abandon or postpone the Copper Mile would be to entail a great deal of track tape, not to mention disappointing the great crowds that had paid their money to witness this great feature. An Arizona

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crowd is an Arizona crowd and a little thing like mud out of a clear sky isn't supposed to stand in the way of a real hoss-race, so, unless the Coburn stables, the biggest stables and the heaviest entrant, made formal protest, the race would be carried out as per schedule. The Coburn crowd did not protest.

AT FOUR, when the Copper Mile horses had finally been called out, Al and I received a real surprize. Busy with getting our rider, Little Joe, off on Vanity in good shape, we had not noticed old Major's familiar form towering amid the entrants. But now, with nothing to do except await the outcome, old Maje and his rider jumped into our calculations like a diving bear into a shallow tank.

"Major!" gasped Al.

"Mud!" I ejaculated.

Together we surveyed the mountain of a horse with its rider, a little swart figure humped like a cricket high over the animal's withers and clad in the deep purple of an unknown stable.

"You got your half of that money?" demanded Al.

"Here." I replied.

"Give it to me!" ordered Al and, grabbing it, he sailed away toward the book-makers, digging meanwhile into his own pocket for his share of the money we'd got for Major.

"Major Action—to win!" he gasped. "Major Action runnin'? Well then, to win!"

Al got our money down at nine to one, but before he had finished, the book-makers had thoughfully raised their estimate of Major's chances from long odds to nearly even money. It was a long way from April and Orleans to November and Phœnix and poor old Maje had had a long period of dry tracks and hard luck, but the bookies have long memories and with this mud—well, before the horses assembled at the barrier Maje was quoted at even money.

This is not to be a chronicle of the long battle of wits and speed waged at the barrier. This is a story of mud. There was mud before the barrier, the horses were spattered and the riders smeared and short-tempered before the starter got them as he wanted them and let them off to as pretty a start as any horseman would care to see.

On the solid footing of the first eighth two of the Coburn horses took a slight lead, while our own Vanity crowded them closely. Then came, close-bunched, the field of eight thorough milers and among them Major plowed his way, gallantly taking the punishment of the solid track under his tender old shins. His rider lay close to his neck, easing him along more smoothly than any one else we had ever seen astride his powerful back.

"Who's that ridin' Maje, anyhow?" queried Al a little nervously.

"Seems like you'd found out before you shot the roll on him to win," I replied almost testily.

"Well," defended Al, "I counted on Maje to win without any rider—in this mud and all."

"That rider ain't hurting Maje's chances any," I ventured as I saw the leading horses begin to throw mud.

Immediately the followers commenced to plow through the heavy-going, while Major's rider, still with a close rein, passed one horse—than another.

"No, that rider ain't hurtin' Maje's chances a bit."

At the half-mile two horses had forged up out of the rabble and were commencing to crowd the Coburn leaders. Of these one was a huge black, ridden by a negro jockey in the green and gold of the Clayholm stables. The other was old Maje.

Within the next quarter Maje and the black, running nose and nose, passed our Vanity as if she were running backward. The mud was beginning to tell on Vanity as well as on the most of the others. In front of Maje and the black ran the big Coburn gray, the favorite and a miler without a peer. Slightly behind the gray staggered a second Coburn horse, battling despairingly with the mud. Already Major and the black lapped the flank of the second horse. To pass her took a good eighth but Maje and the black did it.

Together they heaved up behind the gray, fighting for second place. The soft mud and Major's peculiar tendencies formed an affinity that put delight into his big, stout heart and gave him courage to run as he never could run on a hard track where each crashing contact of his hoofs spelled misery to his bruised limbs.

They were on the stretch now, and the *whack* and *splosh* of their hoofs could be plainly heard in the tensed stands. Each horse and rider was literally covered with the brown stain and flakes of adobe mud.

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The Coburn gray, weirdly unsplashed, breasted the pole and held the lead by half a length. To the gray's right plowed Maje and to the right of Major, almost in the middle of the track, plowed the black.

Then something occurred. Maje's rider suddenly flattened to nothing against the horse's mane and his hands crept up until they fairly shoved against the cheek of Maje's light bridle. There was no whip—a mere tightening of the spurred heel once. Old Major lifted his stride imperceptibly, but enough as that each leap brought his straining nose a trifle farther ahead of the black and closer to the shoulder of the gray.

The green and gold hump on the black stirred suddenly as the little negro's arm swung the whip frantically. Now Major lapped the shoulder of the gray, the black barely holding his own at Maje's rump. Momentarily Maje's fine old head bobbed uncertainly beside the streaming shoulder of the plunging gray then, his rider, light as thistledown upon the horse's piston-like shoulders, gave him a call for more speed and, as by some magic, old Maje was able to respond.

A moment more and Maje had thrust his distended nostrils almost to the nose of the gray. In a panic the gray's rider struck his horse with the whip and jerked forward in an effort to increase the stride. Again the whip fell.

It was as if each lash had struck Maje instead of the gray, for at the first blow Maje's nose had lowered the fraction of an inch and at the second lash the old mud-loving freak, his ears back in his mane and his huge frame tensed to the utmost, swung through the trample of hoof-marks before the barrier and, wide-eyed and spent, swept under the wire a good head in the lead. Behind plowed the black in third place, with our own Vanity fighting a losing battle for fifth place with a soggy-muscled bay.

As the riders came back before the judges where Al and I were waiting to take Vanity off, Al's hand came up in a formal military salute. The salute was returned in all preciseness by Maje's rider. For there, mud-stained and swarthy, panting with the unaccustomed exertion, humped over the saddle, an utterly commonplace jockey in the deep purple of an unknown stable, was our lieutenant.

Al turned to me.

"Take these tickets an' run over to the books an' collect our thirty-five hundred. Myself, I'm goin' up in the alley an' beat my brains out."

"Some horse-trade we made," I said, hastening to shoulder a part of the blame.

Al only grunted.

LATE that evening as Al and I passed along the stables on our way out to supper we stopped to look in at old Maje contentedly nibbling the expensive feed of the Coburn stables. The lieutenant stood near-by with the elder Coburn.

"It'll pay to keep him just for a mudder," the lieutenant was saying. "I've wanted him ever since I saw him in New Orleans. He's the best miler I've ever ridden—provided there's plenty of mud."

"Provided there's mud!" Al looked at me quizzically. "Provided there's plenty of mud!" Indicating the little lieutenant Al continued: "Say doc, how much d'you reckon that bird slept last night?"

"Well," I replied, "from the looks of the irrigating that was carried on I'd say he didn't do much sleeping."

"Mud!" Al snorted. "Mud, an' us sittin' here on the verge of starvation all through the meetin', pinin' for mud to run Maje in. Bah!"

Stepping across to where the lieutenant and Coburn were standing, Al addressed the former:

"Say, loot, me an' my partner're going to turn farmer and we're looking for some purveyor of dog-meat who desires to purchase a couple more receptacles."

"I'm in that business myself," replied the lieutenant, "and I might as well look your string over in the morning, thank you. No, make it Monday. Call me up at The Inn Monday morning."

"Who'll we ask for?"

"Lieutenant Elbert Tondy."

Al and I eased our way outside and stood in the dusk waiting for a car into town. Finally Al broke the silence.

"I said officers thought they were smarter than the general run of privates, didn't I? Well, they are. They gotta be. That's why they're officers. Take this lieutenant, for instance."

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The ANT-EATER

by
Arthur O Friel

Author of "The Vampire," "The Mother of the Moon," etc.

DID you know, *senhores*, that the ant-eater can kill the jaguar? It is true. Those long knife-claws with which he tears open rotten stumps in his search for food can also stab the king of the jungle.

I myself have seen it. I have cut my way through the bush to a place where I heard sounds of fighting, and there I found a dead ant-bear with his great claws hooked into the body of a dying jaguar. The big gray destroyer of ants had taken his slayer with him to death in a terrible grapple that could not be broken.

Yet the ant-bear never seeks trouble. He goes shambling along attending to his business in life, licking up ants with that long sticky tongue of his, and bothering no other animal if he is let alone.

He is a queer-looking thing, not at all handsome, but he is very useful. If you two Americans have ever been bitten by the accursed fire-ant while you were exploring the Javary jungles, or have seen a house fall to pieces because it had been eaten to a shell by termites, you will agree with me when I say that there is use for millions of ant-eaters here in Brazil.

I never kill one, for I feel that he is a friend. But if I should kill one I should do it from a distance, and not allow myself to be deceived by his clumsy appearance and his peaceful nature. For it is with animals as it is with men, *senhores*—often those that are usually harmless become dangerous when attacked.

There are other ways, too, in which animals and men sometimes resemble one another. Perhaps in your own United States you have met men who had the appearance and the nature of some beast or bird or reptile. But you would never suppose, would you, that any man could be like the ant-bear—even to his habit of eating ants?

Laugh if you will—it is droll, I admit. But perhaps you do not know that among the many kinds of ants crawling in our jungle there is one which is eatable by men—the *tanajura*, which is an inch long and can be fried in lard and eaten.

And once I met a man who ate these ants, and who was like a great gray ant-bear in more ways than that. So now, to pass the time while the steamer carries us on down the Amazon, I will tell you the tale of this man.

I CAME upon him while I was on an adventuring cruise in the flood season, when the low-lying rubber forests of old Coronel Nunes, my employer, were drowned by the rising waters and we *seringueiros* could work there no more. With a mate of mine, a tall young fellow named Pedro, I had paddled southward

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through the watery bush until we came into hill country higher than the flood level.

There we had followed a rain-swollen creek which now was a river, and up that river we had found a great hollow tree where men dropped dead, and had learned why this was so—because they walked on poisoned thorns. And now, leaving behind us the body of a man who had tried to kill us on those thorns but had died there himself, we went on up the river, seeking anything else that might be new and strange.

To left and right of us rose the hills. Those to the left were low, but from the other bank they went up and up and up until, miles away, they became mountains—the mountains of Peru.

So far we had found easy paddling, for the flooded creek was smooth and deep. But as we went onward the hills grew more steep and the stream more narrow and swift, with white water now and then that gave us stiff work.

And at length the banks swung toward each other, holding between them a roaring rapid up which no canoe could go. So there we stopped.

Hanging to a drooping branch, we held the dugout steady and studied that leaping, lashing water and the steep banks beside it. And Pedro said:

"This far we go, and no farther. That *cachoeira* is more than we or any other men could mount, and no doubt it is even worse higher up.

"So, Lourenço, either we go ashore and tramp a while or go back down-stream. Which shall it be?"

"Both," I answered. "I am going to land and stretch my legs, for I have the canoe-cramp. And after I have tramped along beside the *cachoeira* and tired of looking down into it, we may as well drift back down the current."

We swung the canoe over to the right bank, drew it well up on the shore and stretched ourselves. Then, taking our rifles, we worked up along the rapid, finding the bush not very thick, so that we could travel without much trouble over the rough ground and stop now and then to gaze at the tumbling waters below us. After a time we sat down and smoked.

"I have hunger," said Pedro, "and I want fresh meat. I am tired of *carne secca* and *farinha* and dried fish. If a monkey comes along, shoot him."

Before our cigarets were burned down a monkey did come along. I spied him peering at us from a tall *matamata* tree.

He was only a little fellow, not large enough to make a meal for two men; but still he was fresh meat, and I swung up my rifle. But he sprang behind the trunk where I could not see him.

We waited for him to leap for the branches of other trees, hoping to get a shot as he moved. He stayed where he was, however, and so we got up to work around the tree, Pedro on one side and I on the other. But before we found our prey something happened.

Somewhere off in the bush rose a long-drawn yell:

"Chico-o-o! Chico-o-o-o-o!"

We stood astonished, for we had thought no man but ourselves was in this place. The shout came again, a little nearer now.

Up in the tree the little monkey made a chattering sound, and as we did not move he hopped up on to a branch, looking toward that call. We could easily have killed him, but we did not. The three of us, monkey and men, waited for that approaching man to come to us.

"Chico-o-o-o! Where are you, rascal?" called the voice, and we heard some one rustling through the bush.

The monkey fussed again, but did not jump. Then out from the trees came the man, who stopped short as he saw us.

HE LOOKED queer. That was my first thought as I looked at him—"queer."

At first, though, I did not see just why he seemed so. He wore almost nothing—only a tattered pair of breeches with belt and machete; but there was nothing strange about that, for we ourselves were not much better off except that our breeches were whole and we wore boots.

He was very hairy, and the hair was gray, though his face was not old; but that was not very odd either, for age is not a matter of hair. And though he was gray he looked stronger than either of us, for he was a big fellow and heavily muscled.

But then as I studied him I saw what was odd about him.

Above that powerful body were a long neck and a narrow head with small eyes and

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ears—a head that looked as if it had not much room for brains. And as he stood staring at us he ran out a long tongue and licked his lips in a way that made him look foolish.

And I thought, this is a big good-natured fellow who is not a fool but is not very wise either—a simple-minded man whose heart is bigger than his head. And soon I found that this was so.

Up overhead the monkey made another fussing sound. And though we were strangers, with rifles in our hands, the man looked up eagerly and then turned his back on us, walking up to the *matamata* tree.

"Chico, rascal!" he said in a half-scolding way. "Come here to me! You are a bad child, and if you do not stop running away I shall set you down on an ant-hill and hold you there until they eat all the hair off your tail! Come here!"

The monkey came down slowly while Pedro and I stood snickering at the thought of him hopping around with a tail full of ants. We knew very well that the threat was only a joke, and were very glad that we had not killed the little pet.

Chico came swinging down a long drooping vine, stopping near the ground as if he wanted his master to chase him up again. But the big gray man stood still, talking in a coaxing tone, and so Chico swung to other vines and came across until he was over his master. Then the man reached a hand to him and put him on his left shoulder where he perched and wrinkled his funny little face at us.

"Your bad child seems to make much trouble for you, friend," said Pedro.

"It is the truth," the man answered. "He is a mischievous fellow and a great care. If you have sons of your own perhaps you understand how it is."

He said it so seriously that we roared with laughter. The idea of this powerful man talking of that shriveled little monkey as his son was too much for us.

But he did not grow angry. He grinned slowly, scratched the monkey's neck with one big finger and let us laugh.

When we stopped he said:

"I have two sons besides this little Chico—real sons, who some day will be big men. Now they are not old enough to come out here with me, but must stay at home with their mother.

"So I have taken this little fellow as my son too, to keep me company while I stay here alone. He likes me, even if he is a bad boy at times—is it not so, Chico? I wonder if he would like you too."

Carefully he lifted the monkey from his shoulder and lowered him to the ground. Then he pointed toward us.

Smiling, Pedro squatted and spoke coaxingly to the little pet, and after watching him a minute Chico came over to us and let Pedro stroke him. Then he caught hold of one of my bootlaces and played with it.

He climbed up my leg, too, and slipped a paw into one of my pockets; but I lifted him away before he got anything and held him in my hands and scratched his neck and then set him down on the earth. He went to playing with my bootlace again. Then his master came up to us and lifted him again to his shoulder.

"You are honest men," he said simply. "If you were not, Chico would not make friends with you. Now if you wish to come to my *tambo* I shall be glad.

"I am Thomaz Nobrega, and I am here because I have been hunting gold. I have found it, too, and if you do not believe it you can come and see it."

We glanced at each other thinking he must be very simple indeed to tell two armed strangers that he had gold. He trusted us, of course, because Chico did.

And it is true, *senhores*, for I have noticed it myself, that sometimes animals can sense evil in a man when grown men and women can not. They seem to feel it as they feel an approaching storm and other dangerous things. Yet I would not trust the judgment of any monkey, or of most men either, where gold was concerned.

AS IF there could be no question of our good hearts, now that Chico had found us friends, the man Thomaz turned away and started back the way he had come. We followed.

Soon the pair ahead of us stopped, and Thomaz pointed up a small creek which probably held no water in the dry season, for now it was neither wide nor deep. Then he went on along the bank of this stream, and the four of us stopped again at a small *tambo*. And there on the ground near his hammock was a rough heap of ordinary dirt.

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"This is my treasure," he said, pointing at the dirt-pile.

We frowned at it and then at him, wondering if he was crazed. He chuckled and added:

"It does not look as if it were worth much, does it? But now see what I shall show you."

Stooping, he clawed away a few handfuls of earth from the side of the pile. Then he stood up and pointed at the hole he had made.

Out from that hole shone a yellow gleam. And we saw that the dirt-pile was really a heap of gold concealed under a few inches of earth.

"You see, it is as I said," he told us. "I have found gold. Thomaz Nobrega, whom men laugh at and call Tamandua, has found fortune in this lonely forest where those who laughed were too lazy to go.

"Feel it, friends. Lift it. It is real gold."

We did not need to lift it, for one look showed us that it was true gold. And I was staring at the man himself. He had said that men called him Tamandua, and I thought how well the name fitted him.

For *tamandua bandeira*, as you probably know, is the great ant-bear; and Thomaz, with his thick gray hair and narrow head and that long tongue with which he licked his lips, did look much like that animal.

He lacked the broad black stripe over his chest and sides, and of course he had not the ant-bear's great bushy tail; but if ever there was a human ant-bear, it was he. And we soon found that he really ate ants.

"Sit down, friends, and be comfortable," he said, "and I will make you such a meal as I can."

So we leaned our rifles against a corner-post and sat in the hammock and rolled cigarets. When these were lit we told him who we were and how we had come there, and watched him while he made a fire.

When this was going well he got out a pan, greased it with a piece of fat which he took from a small clay jar, and held it over the blaze until it was smoking hot. Then he picked up another jar plugged with a ball of leaves, took out the plug and shook the dish into the hot pan. At once came the sound and smell of something frying.

"What have you there, friend Thomaz?" I asked, for I could not see what he had shaken into the smoke. He grinned slowly and answered:

"Something very good, which I think you will like. Something that will probably be new to your tongue, although you must have seen them many times. *Tanajuras*."

"*Por Deus!*" exclaimed Pedro. "Do you eat ants?"

Thomaz chuckled, and said:

"Yes, I do eat ants. I have eaten them since I was a child, for they are very good if you like them. But now I eat them because there is not much other food that I can get. I have been out for a long time, and my cartridges are all gone."

Looking around, we saw a rusty rifle lying across the poles overhead. We saw too that, excepting the useless weapon, his hammock, a few small tools and some things for cooking, there was nothing at all in the place—except that heap of gold.

There was no food, and his only clothing was that ragged pair of breeches which were almost falling off him. As he said, he had been out for a long time.

"I can kill a sloth with my machete whenever I find one, and eat that," he added. "But that is not often, and so I have to live on these ants, which are easy to get. I hope you will like them, Pedro and Lourenço."

"Why do you not take your gold, Thomaz, and go back to your home and get more cartridges and dried food and other things you need, and then come back?" asked Pedro. "Come back when the rains have gone and this place is dry, and it will be much easier to work."

But the gray man shook his head.

"I have lost this place once," he said, "and it took me a long time to find it again. If I should leave it now perhaps I should never see it more. I shall stay here until I have all the gold I can find, and then I will go out for good.

"You know how it is in the jungle—if you go away for only a little while from a place and then come back it does not look the same, because vines and bushes and creepers have grown and made it look strange; and so perhaps you will lose it."

I nodded, and he went on:

"I found this place first when I was out as a rubber scout, trying to find new trees

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so that I could ask Duarte Gomes for some money. Do you know Duarte Gomes? No? He is a hard man. He will do anything for money, and he will give money only when he expects to make much more money by doing so.

"And so, needing money, I tried to find a new rubber district, intending then to make him pay me well to tell him where it was. And while I was hunting I found this place of gold. But my mind was so full of rubber that I went away and left it, thinking I would come back here when I found rubber too."

I NODDED again, for I could see that a simple mind like his might be so full of one thought that it would not change quickly to a bigger idea.

"But I did not find rubber, and when I tried to come back here I could not find this place either," he continued. "So I went home and told Gomes about the gold, offering to hunt for it if he would pay me.

"He laughed at me and told me to find the gold first and then he would help me to get it out if I would give him half. He would not give me even a cartridge. But I got some cartridges in other ways, and a few tools, and started out again.

"My wife said—

" 'If you find gold keep it all yourself, and do not be so simple as to let him have any of it, for he has no right to it at all.'

"And she is right—it is my gold and he shall not have any of it. He gave me no help, and now I want no help. I had to hunt a long time, and the rains came, and my cartridges went, and it was only by luck that I finally reached this place again.

"And now when I go out Gomes will be sorry he did not help me. I shall be as rich as he, and my wife and boys will have everything grand.

"Am I not right, friends? Is not this gold all mine?"

We told him that it surely was, and that he must not let that Gomes or any other man take any of it from him. And we asked him whether he had told Gomes where this creek of gold was.

He said yes, he had, but Gomes did not believe it, so he would not be likely to look for it; and besides how could Gomes find it when Thomaz himself had had so hard a hunt? We said nothing, but we thought of the same thing—that Gomes might get an Indian to search the jungle and see if he could find either Thomaz or his gold.

We thought, too, that something might happen to Thomaz before he could reach home with his fortune. And we asked him how he planned to take it out when he had gotten it all from the creek.

"I do not know," he said. "First I must get all the gold. Perhaps then I will make a basket to hang on my back, and carry as much as I can to the water below the *cachoeira*, and then come back for more, until it is all there by the stream. And then with my machete and with fire perhaps I can make a canoe.

"But I do one thing at a time, and the thing to do now is to pile up all the gold.

"Chico, rascal, be still! You shal' have some ants, yes."

He flipped out a hot ant from the pan, and Chico grabbed it. Then he dropped it. His master laughed.

"Perhaps that will teach you not to be so greedy," he said. "Wait until it is cool."

Chico poked at the insect with a finger, and finally seized it again and ate it.

"Now, friends, the meal is ready," Thomaz told us, bringing the pan to us. "Eat as much as you like, for I can easily catch more *tanajuras*."

But somehow we were not hungry now. We had never eaten ants, and these did not look very inviting. And so I said:

"I am sorry, friend, but we do not like the taste of ants. We have not eaten enough of them to become used to them. So eat them all, you and Chico, and we will go out and see if we can shoot something that we all will like."

He looked hurt and answered slowly:

"You do not like them? But you have not tried them. Eat a few and you will find them good."

But we shook our heads and arose.

"I know they are good if a man likes them," I said. "But, you see, we do not care for them. You know how it is—one man's taste is not the same as that of another man."

He nodded and said that was so, and he was sorry he had nothing else to offer us. Perhaps, he said, he could find a sloth somewhere and cook that for us if we wanted meat.

But we told him again that we would shoot something and then we would come

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back and share it with him. And we went away and left him sitting on his gold-pile, feeding himself and his monkey on those fried ants.

In the bush we stopped and looked back at him.

"Poor fellow!" said Pedro softly. "He is so trustful, just because that monkey made friends with us. Look at him—he is not even watching us.

"We could stand here and kill him and take all his gold. And so could any other men who found him.

"That man Gomes, now, who is a hard man and would do anything for gold—Lourenço, this big gray fellow needs protection. Let us give it to him."

"We will give him more than that," I added. "Let us give him food and cartridges. We are only on a rambling trip and can go back whenever we desire, while he is fighting for a life's ease for himself and his family. And though he likes ants he must be tired of them."

"That is just what I was thinking," nodded Pedro. "Perhaps our cartridges will not fit his gun, but if they do we will give him all we can spare. And whatever else we can do for him we will do."

We slipped away into the bush and headed toward our canoe, stepping softly in hope of seeing some fine fat *mutum* bird or other creature good to eat. But we met nothing of the kind, and we were nearing the river when Pedro halted.

He held up a hand for silence. We listened.

IT SEEMED to me that I heard a murmur and a rustle off to our left, but I was not sure. No more sounds came to us, except the steady snarl of the rapids. We went on.

At the canoe we took out all the food and cartridges we could safely spare. And when this was done Pedro said—

"I thought I heard low voices back there in the bush, and the sound of men passing by."

"I thought I heard something of the sort too," I told him. "But probably it was only the noise of the *cachoeira*, and perhaps a little breeze up overhead."

He stared thoughtfully down-stream, and asked—

"It was at the left?"

"At the left," I agreed.

"And that would be down-stream," he said. "Lourenço, it may mean nothing, but let us paddle down a little way and look along the bank. It will not take much time."

So we pushed the canoe out from the tangle and dropped down the river close to the bank. Suddenly Pedro held his paddle and grunted. I looked. And there in a small cove, half-hidden by overhanging leaves, lay another canoe.

"Aha!" said Pedro. "I was right. Men passed us, going away from this stream. They were going toward the *tambo* of Thomaz, too."

He started, struck by a sudden thought.

"Lourenço! It may be that man Gomes! Gomes and others, seeking Thomaz and his treasure! What do you think?"

"It may be so," I answered. "This canoe has just come—the paddles are wet. Whoever these men are, if they find Thomaz they will see his gold, for he did not cover up that hole he made for us in his pile. I think we had better waste no time in getting back to him."

We whirled and went swiftly back to our landing-place.

There we hid our canoe again, loaded ourselves with the food and cartridges for Thomaz and started toward his little *tambo*. It had seemed only a short distance on our first trip, but now that we were in haste we found it quite a tramp to that small creek.

Yet we took care not to rush but to go quietly, so that we could come up behind the strangers without their knowing it. When we stopped near the hut of the Ant-Eater we knew they had not heard us.

Four men stood now where we had left only one man and a monkey. One was long and lean with a yellow face and a cruel mouth half-hidden by a big blue-black mustache curving down toward his chin. Two were snake-eyed Indians.

The fourth was Thomaz. And Thomaz was the only one without a gun. The others held rifles, and the yellow man wore also a revolver.

"But the gold is not yours, Gomes," the gray man was saying in his slow way. "It is all mine. You would not give me even a cartridge or a mouthful of *farinha* to help me to live while I found this place again. You only laughed at me, and now you have no right to what I have found."

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"I told you to come and find the gold and then I would help you take it out, and I should have half," Gomes growled. "Now I am here to take it out for you. Do not try to get out of your agreement."

Thomaz stared at him.

"But there was not any agreement," he said. "You did nothing to help me, and I did not make any agreement. I came back by myself and found it myself, and I will take it away myself. It is all mine."

"Did I not tell you to go and find it?" demanded Gomes.

"Yes, you did say so, but you were laughing at me."

"No; it is an agreement," Gomes insisted. "I am here, and half of that gold is mine. I will take it all out for you and give half of it to your family.

"You can stay here and dig more, and I will come back again until we have it all. Then I will take you home, and you will be very rich."

Pedro, beside me, growled something and would have stepped out. But I held him back.

"Not yet," I whispered. "We may be more useful to Thomaz if those others do not know we are here."

And he stayed where he was.

"I did not tell you to come after me," said the gray man patiently. "I did not want you to come. I do not want any help now. And you know it is not your gold. My wife told me it would all be mine if I found it, and it is so."

"Your wife?" Gomes sneered. "What does that old woman know? You can not cheat me, and you had better not try it."

"But the strangers also said it was all mine," persisted Thomaz. "Two fine honest men told me——"

"Strangers?"

Gomes turned quickly and looked all about. But we stood quiet, hidden in the bush.

"What strangers? Where are they?"

"I do not know where they are. They went away. Two fine men named Pedro and Lourenço who came and made me a visit. And they said the gold was all mine, and I must not let any man take it away from me. So I know I am right."

"Oh, they have gone," said the black-mustached man, looking relieved. "So they came and saw your gold and went away? You fool, they will come back and rob you. I will take the gold out at once before they return."

"No, they will not rob me," Thomaz answered. "They are honest men. Chico found them honest, and he knows. And Chico will not have anything to do with you, Gomes."

"That fool monkey?" the yellow man sneered. "You mean that I am not honest because that dirty little beast does not like me?

"Have care, Ant-Eater! I have had enough of your foolishness. Now get out of my way and give me that gold!"

HIS voice was a snarl. The two Indians leaned forward a little, their rifles ready. But Thomas stood unmoved.

"Whether you are honest or not is something you know better than I," he said. "But you shall not have one grain of my gold—unless Chico says so. Chico, rascal, come here!"

He looked upward, and so did the others. We knew the monkey must be up on one of the roof-poles, where we could not see him.

"Come down, rascal!" coaxed the gray man. "If this be an honest man who can be trusted, come down and show us that you trust him."

And he pointed at Gomes, holding his finger steady as he talked.

For minutes the men stood there in that way. Then Thomaz said:

"You see, he will not come near you or have anything to do with you. He has gone back into the farthest corner. He knows! So go away, and do not bother us more."

The yellow man ripped out a string of curses.

"I will send your monkey to ——, and you too if you interfere!" he yelled.

His right hand dropped and rose. Flame spat from it. The crash of the revolver-shot made us jump. And down from the roof tumbled poor little Chico.

He struck the ground near a corner-post and struggled in the dirt. Then he got to his haunches and sat there facing Gomes.

With one little hand he pushed toward his slayer as if to drive him away. With the other he plucked feebly at his body.

After a moment he lifted that hand too

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and held it up for all to see. It was red with blood. And he held it there, *senhores,* until he crumpled over into a pitiful little heap and lay still.

I am not a soft-hearted man, but something came up in my throat as I saw that thing. And Pedro growled again and snapped up his rifle.

"I have got that yellow devil," he rasped in an undertone. "Cover one of the *caboclos!*"

I did so. But, though I too was hot with rage, I whispered:

"Do not shoot—yet. Wait until they attack Thomaz."

I heard him grit his teeth, but he did as I said. And there we stood, each covering a man and waiting. But those shots were not fired. For Thomaz Nobrega, good-humored eater of ants, suddenly became another man.

He stared down at his dead pet. Then he lifted a face that was black as the wrath of God.

Gomes, looking into that face, stepped back from him. His revolver swung up again and once more he fired—this time at Thomaz. And then things happened so fast that we forgot to shoot.

With a roaring yell the big gray man jumped at the yellow one. As he jumped his machete flashed out.

One of the Indians fired his rifle from the hip. A man swayed and fell—but that man was not Thomaz. So swiftly had he sprung past the *caboclo* that the bullet missed him and struck the other Indian in the heart.

For an instant the Indian who had fired stood dazed, staring at the mate he had killed. In that instant death came to him. Without even looking aside, the Ant-Eater swung his machete sidewise and backward. It caught the *caboclo* in the neck. He dropped sprawling, his head chopped nearly from his body.

Before the dead man struck the ground Thomaz had seized Gomes. He seemed to forget his machete, and to want to crush Gomes to death in his great arms.

Clinching, they went off their feet, the yellow man's revolver exploding again as they fell. Then on the ground they rolled and fought in a death-grapple.

Gomes got his gun-hand loose and shot again, but the bullet went wild. We heard him cry out with pain as that frightful grip tightened around him. He dropped his revolver and tore with his free hand at the gray man's eyes. But Thomaz turned his head away and ground his skull into his enemy's face, and Gomes quit that attempt.

Over they rolled, and somehow Gomes got his revolver back and clubbed Thomaz over the head. The Ant-Eater's grip seemed to loosen. Gomes fought him down under, on his back.

But Thomaz was not yet senseless. Though he was underneath he still held his enemy fast. As Gomes struggled to get the gun against the head of Thomaz and blow out his brains we saw that Ant-Eater's big right hand, still clutching his machete, rise from the yellow man's back.

The machete turned downward. It slid between the ribs of Gomes. The yellow man screamed once. Then he grew limp. Both men lay still.

"*Por Deus!*" said Pedro, lowering his rifle. "And we thought Thomaz needed protection!"

WE RÁN to the *tambo* to see whether the Ant-Eater still lived. We shouted to him, but got no answer. He lay as quiet as the dead men around him.

And when we tried to lift Gomes from him we could not do so. The terrible grip of Thomaz still held, and our tugs at Gomes only forced the machete farther into his body.

"This is a true ant-eater, Pedro," I said. "Just as the ant-bear of the jungle locks his great claws in the body of his enemy and takes him to death with him, so Thomaz has done with Gomes."

Pedro nodded, but said he thought Thomaz still lived. And after each of us took one of those powerful arms and forced it away from the body of the yellow man we found that this was so.

Thomaz had lost his senses, and he had been shot through the left side; but the wound was not bad, and when he became conscious he would be in no danger. So we lifted him and carried him into the little creek, where the water washed off the dirt and blood of his fight and revived him at the same time.

He woke up fighting. He knocked us both down in the creek, and when we reached the shore and stopped coughing

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up water he stood there staring at us in a puzzled way. Then he looked around him, saw what lay in his *tambo* and remembered.

Straight to Chico's little body he went. He lifted it tenderly and sat down in his hammock, stroking the soft fur and looking sadly down at the tiny companion whose judgment he had trusted so.

Big tears rolled down his face, and though he made no sound we saw that he could not have grieved more if Chico had been truly his own flesh and blood. Not knowing what to say, we stood silent.

After a time he got up, lifted his red machete from the ground and, limping a little from his wound, went out by himself into the bush. When he came back his hands were empty, and on the hilt of his bush-knife was fresh dirt. And we knew Chico had been given burial.

Not until then did he give any attention to the bullet-hole in his side. As I have said, it was not bad, though the muscles were torn so that they would be very painful for a time. We patched him up as well as we could, and then we took out the bodies of the three intruders and put them where they would do no further harm.

When we returned he still sat in his hammock, looking soberly down at his pile of gold.

"Did you see what happened?" he asked. We nodded. Slowly he went on:

"I did not want trouble with Gomes and his men. If Chico had said so I might have given them some gold.

"But they killed my little baby comrade. And so they had to die."

And again we were glad we had not shot that monkey ourselves when first we met him, for now we knew we should have had to kill this big simple fellow too.

"I did not tell Gomes so, but I am almost ready to go out," he said after a while. "I am not finding much gold now."

"Then you had better go out at once," we told him.

But he shook his head and said that first he wanted to be sure. And so, having nothing else to do, we offered to work his creek for him and see what the prospect was.

We stayed there several days, searching that little stream while he sat on the bank nursing his sore side and talking to us. And we found he was right; there was no gold left worth staying for.

So then we packed his gold through the bush to the *cachoeira*, and there we loaded it into the canoe of the men who had come to rob him. With the canoe, he said, it would be easy for him to reach his home, as it would take him within a day's march of the place where he lived, and he could hide canoe and gold in the bush while he went and got his wife and boys to help carry his treasure.

We gave him food and cartridges, too, and pushed his boat out into the stream. But he caught a vine and held it.

"Come and stay with me for a time—I should like to have you live with me forever," he urged us. "You have done everything for me, and I have done nothing for you except to offer you *tanajuras*, which you do not like."

But we laughed and refused.

"We have the wandering foot, Thomaz," we told him, "and we have stayed overlong in one place. Now we have decided to ramble on above this *cachoeira* and see whatever we may see there.

"So go home, and good luck go with you. And do not offer us any of that gold of yours or you will have a worse fight on your hands than you had with Gomes and his *caboclos*."

He grinned and rubbed his thick gray hair as if he did not know just what to say. Then he said only, "*Adeos*, comrades," and went away. But before the canoe had gone two lengths he turned and threw two little nuggets of gold at our feet.

"From me, Thomaz Nobrega, in memory of Chico!" he called.

And at once he began paddling in a way that must have hurt his side sorely, and quickly he and his treasure were gone around a bend.

We picked up the nuggets and kept them, as he had said, in memory. See, here is mine. I have smoothed it into the shape of an ant-eater's head, and whenever my fingers touch it I remember the man who was so queer and simple, and yet killed two men to avenge the murder of a monkey.

Yes, *senhores*, as I said at the beginning, the ant-bear is a harmless fellow when let alone, and he seeks no trouble with any one. But if ever you meet with a man who looks and acts like that ant-bear, do not crowd him too far. If you should do so you might not live long enough to be sorry.

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WOOD *and* STEEL

by

Farnham Bishop

Author of "Snake Head," "Ten Thousand Hectareas," etc.

All is lost! The city will fall tonight. Take your jewels and go at once with the admiral on board *El Vencedor*. Wait for me there. I follow.
YOUR FATHER.

BY THE light of the blazing suburbs, while the windows of the Palacio shook with the discharge of the field-guns defending the flimsy barricade at the other end of the Avenida Grande, Señorita Carlota read this fearful midnight message from her father, Don Ignacio Herrera, President of the Republic of Veragua.

Ever since 1864, the year of his daughter's birth, Don Ignacio had ruled his country more strongly and wisely than any President, Dictator or Viceroy in its chaotic history. But now as the old warrior-statesman was making his last stubborn stand in the very streets of Veragua City on All Saints' Eve, 1883, the end of his long reign seemed closed indeed.

And yet even with his own written confession of defeat in her hand and the sound of battle roaring ever louder and nearer Carlota could not believe that her father's power was broken. For to her, who had known and accepted both as obvious and eternal facts since earliest childhood, his presidency seemed no less unshakable and everlasting than the snow-capped peaks of the Cordilleras that on clear days could be seen from the streets of the seaport-capital.

"Did my father give you this himself?" she demanded of the bearer.

"With his own hands, *señorita*," he replied impressively.

In all the city there was no more impressive and imposing personage than he, Admiral Count Ivan Kasevitch, late of the Imperial Russian Navy, now Minister of Marine and commander-in-chief of the naval forces of Veragua. There Spanish usage spared every one the impossible task of trying to pronounce such a northern barbarity of a name; they spoke of him as "El Cond," and addressed him as "Don Juan."

Bradshaw, the sarcastic little undersecretary of the British Legation, said that nothing could be more appropriate. Kasevitch had been celebrated as the handsomest and most obliging bachelor in St. Petersburg; which perhaps explains his sudden rise and even more sudden dismissal from the Czar's service.

Speaking Spanish as perfectly as he did six other languages and outdoing his hosts in courtesy and punctilio, the young Slav soon made himself at home in a land where surface polish counts as nine and character as one. Veragua declared its admiral to be the most gallant *caballero* and the greatest naval expert in the world. And how gloriously he dressed!

Even now, when he had avowedly come from a battle, his uniform was as white, its yards of gold lace as bright and untarnished, as if he had just left his luxurious quarters on *El Vencedor*. But Carlota knew too little of battles and thought too much of her father's peril to notice this.

"He still lives?" she cried as if that were not the first question she had asked when the admiral had been ushered in five minutes before by the officer of the guard. "He is not wounded?"

"He lives uninjured and performing prodigies of valor," Kasevitch reassured

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her. "But even so, the President and the handful still loyal to him can not defend the city much longer against the savage hordes that swarm and press against the barricades.

"If only he had not torn down the old Spanish wall and filled up the moat to make a boulevard! As it is the town lies open to attack on the landward side and the rebels will take it by sunrise at the latest—perhaps within the hour.

"Therefore your father commands you to go with me aboard the ironclad while yet there is time. He himself will follow soon——"

"I will not go!" exclaimed Carlota, throwing down the jewel-case she had taken from a modern wall-safe built into an ancient hiding-place in the paneled wall. "I will wait here for my father. If the rebels kill him, I do not care what they may do to me. They shall not say that Don Ignacio's daughter— Ah, *Dios*, what is that?

A sudden terrible outcry, half-roar, half-scream, from thousands of angry throats, came from the direction of the attack. At the same time the noise of firing redoubled and rose to a crescendo, mingled with strange rhythmic whirrings and rattling crashes that stood out againsr the roar of musketry and the boom of field-pieces.

"The Gatlings and Hotchkiss guns from *El Vencedor!*" cried Kasevitch. "Half my crew are ashore serving them on the inner barricade. It means that the rebels have stormed the outer defenses and that we can delay no longer. Come, *señorita*, to the carriage."

"One moment, Don Juan."

The officer of the guard, a limping, gray-haired captain, whose high cheek-bones showed his Indian blood, interposed as Kasevitch was about to lead Carlota down the broad marble staircase to the patio.

"I must have this to show Don Ignacio when he comes as my authority for letting you take Señorita Carlota from my care."

So saying, he took the note the admiral had brought and placed it carefully inside the high crown of his own braided cap.

KASEVITCH stared haughtily at the presumptuous veteran as if he were about to demand the paper back. But a fresh increase in the distant firing seemed to convince him that it was not worth while. Taking Carlota's arm, he led her rapidly down the stairs and out into the great inner courtyard of the palace.

There two of the presidential carriages, a ponderous old Spanish coach and an American-made victoria, each with the arms of Veragua painted on the door-panels, were ready and waiting. At Carlota's appearance loud screams of relief mingled with prayers to the saints and exhortations to her to hurry came from the coach, where her aunt Doña Isabel, sat wedged in among two ladies-in-waiting, two maids and much hastily packed baggage, including a blasphemous blue parrot in a gilt cage .

Since the death of Carlota's beautiful young English mother many years before the President's sister had acted as hostess at the Palacio and social dictatress of Veragua. Imperiously she shrieked that Carlota must come with her in the coach, crowded though it was; she must not go in that other carriage alone with Don Juan and his sailors—it was most improper and must not be, by all the saints from San Anselmo to San Zacarias!

But the situation was too serious for even Spanish etiquette. At a nod from Kasevitch and a word from the officer of the guard, the great iron gates of the patio swung open.

Out through the archway and across the Cathedral Plaza rumbled the coach, drawn by four beautifully matched mules and escorted by a galloping squad of cavalrymen. The victoria followed; Carlota and Kasevitch on the back seat, two armed petty officers facing them, and a third beside the driver on the box.

The sight of the presidential carriages in full flight brought a wail of despair from the crowd of women, children and old men who had sought sanctuary on the steps of the cathedral. No one cursed or jeered the fleeing family of the defeated ruler—an unheard-of thing in Latin America.

As the cavalcade swung out of the plaza into the Avenida Marina, the great business thoroughfare leading to the docks, the first glimpse of the drawn sabers and uniforms of the escort scattered a small mob of looters who had been trying to break into Espinosa's, the fashionable jeweler and detested money-lender. Lacking dynamite or a battering-ram, they had no more than scratched the nineteenth-century steel shutters and the seventeenth-century

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iron-bound oaken door that the shrewd old Spaniard used to protect his stock in trade.

Nor was he alone in this. Ten generations of misrule and disorder had taught the merchants of Veragua City to turn their shops into fortresses at sundown, nor could nineteen years of tranquility induce them to do otherwise.

Don Ignacio's rule was just and strong, Don Ignacio's new police had suppressed disorder—but Don Ignacio was not immortal. Some day he would die and the bad old times would come again.

And now, while Don Ignacio was still alive, they had come! Beneath the smooth, fair surface of the Herrera administration gnawed many maggots; some in gold lace like Kasevitch, others in high collars and tight patent leathers like the idlers who swarmed in the lobby of the Hotel Bolivar, the Sports Club, and all the government departments. The sons of the old-fashioned *hacendados* who had lived among their peasants and knew their thoughts and grievances better than they did themselves, now wrote to their gringo overseers to speed up production and send another check to Veragua City.

Many of the foreigners who had been invited in to develop the country were arrogant and greedy—particularly the Berlin Mining Syndicate, Ltd. Taxes and prices rose every year, while men grumbled, unconsciously waiting for a leader to appear.

Then a cowardly, cunning *comandante* on the Equatan border seized and vilely tortured the sweetheart of the smuggler Pedro Prestán, to make her betray her lover's secret way across the mountains. They still sing in those mountains to-day the "Song of Pedro Prestán" that tells how bravely she died and how Prestán caught the coward and what he did to him with his bare hands.

Within a month Prestán was no longer a smuggler but a general, and his followers had increased from ten to a hundred—to a thousand—to five thousand.

When troops were sent against him it was discovered that there were no men for half the names on the muster rolls, nor shoes, field-equipment and ammunition enough for all the soldiers that were there and fit to march and fight. No one knew this better than a certain general who had been planning to make himself Dictator as soon as the aged President should die, and who now dramatically deserted to the Prestánistas, taking a large part of the army with him.

Not till then did Don Ignacio leave his wonderful collection of Veraguan orchids and his library of early Spanish chronicles and Indian picture-writings to take the field himself. Before he could move against the rebels they were at the gates of the capital—and the gates were gone! At any moment the last of the hastily improvised barricades would be swept away, and then——

"ALTO!"

Drivers and troopers brought their teams and mounts to a clattering halt at this sudden order from the commander of the escort. Except themselves and the handful of aged veterans guarding the Palacio and a few of the other public buildings, there was not supposed to be an armed body of men in all Veragua City. The police, the firemen, even the employes of the Post-Office had been given muskets and sent to the barricades.

Therefore the *teniente* commanding the escort was greatly startled to see the head of a silent column of soldiery in strange, dark-blue uniforms debouch from a side-street and come marching toward him up the Avenida Marina with the lurid glare of the burning suburbs glinting on the barrels of the shouldered rifles and the drawn sabers of the officers.

"Who lives?" challenged the Veraguan lieutenant in Spanish.

"Landing-party, United States ship *Onondaga*," came the answer.

Kasevitch said something in Russian that did not sound like a prayer.

"Order their commanding officer to report to me before proceeding," he shouted angrily.

A tall, sunburnt young man with the insignia of a lieutenant, junior grade, strode up to the victoria and saluted the admiral.

"By what authority has your captain landed an armed party on Veraguan soil, Lieutenant Merritt?" demanded Kasevitch.

"By order of the American minister, at the request of President Hererra."

"Are you to take part in the defense of the city?" asked the Russian.

He spoke as if he dreaded rather than welcomed such a reinforcement.

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"No such luck!" answered Merritt with obviously sincere regret at being left out of the fun. "Our orders are to guard the American Legation and all who may seek refuge there."

He forbore to remind the other that thirty years before a defeated President and his wife had been forcibly taken from the legation by a mob of triumphant revolutionists, dragged out to the carriage-block on the sidewalk and there literally hacked to pieces with machetes.

"Should it be necessary we should be honored to receive the President's family, either at the legation or on board the *Onondaga*."

As he said this Merritt looked for the first time at Señorita Carlota, who had never taken her eyes from him since he had rounded the corner at the head of his men. It was evidently by no means the first time those two had met, though it might well be the last. Kasevitch thoroughly understood and enjoyed the situation. He gave Carlota no chance to speak.

"Pardon me, but the President prefers to have the ladies aboard an armored ship under their own flag. Permit me to congratulate you, Lieutenant Merritt, on the appearance of your men. The *Onondaga's* crew should serve admirably—ashore. You may proceed. Drive on, *cochero*."

"May you go with God, Don Jaime!" cried Carlota in a voice that made of the commonplace formula a fervent prayer.

Jimmy Merritt tried to respond but could not, so strong was his hate of Kasevitch and his love of her. The only words he could trust himself to utter were those of the drill-book.

"Battalion, attention!"

His young voice rang like a bugle through the roar of the distant firing.

"Forward, full step, march!"

Fifty marines armed with primitive breech-loaders and wearing uniforms of Civil War pattern were followed by a hundred seamen girt with huge old Navy revolvers and brass-hilted cutlases. A dozen others tugged on the drag-ropes of a light, muzzle-loading bronze howitzer.

"A most interesting archeological exhibit!" sneered Kasevitch as they passed. "Why do the Americans persist in saying they have no antiquities of their own?"

Making fun of the obsolescent United States Navy was a recognized sport of the period, in which he excelled. But Carlota did not heed his jests—she did not even hear them. She was back in the ballroom of the Palacio, at the dance given to welcome the officers of the *Onondaga*.

Again she was introduced to Jimmy Merritt, again she felt the strange, ecstatic thrill that passed through her at the touch of their gloved hands in the waltz, again she looked into his gray eyes on the moonlit balcony and read the message he dared not speak. Would they ever meet again? Perhaps, when she was an exile's daughter instead of a President's, he would not be afraid.

How wicked she was to find her own happiness in the misfortune of her father and her people! And yet——

The voice of Kasevitch broke suddenly through her reveries.

"We are here, Señorita Carlota."

Startled, she looked about her. The broad, gas-lit avenue had disappeared. The victoria was standing motionless beside a towering mass of masonry, thick-coated with moss that the complementary glow of the firelight turned from green to black. Above a dark, narrow archway were carved in time-worn, bold relief a royal crown and the arms of Castille and León. It was the water-gate in the sea-wall built to keep out Sir Francis Drake three hundred years ago.

"But where is my aunt?" cried Carlota. "Where are the others?" For the coach and its attendant cavalrymen were nowhere to be seen.

"They went on by mistake to the Marina Wharf," Kasevitch explained. "Instead of turning in here as I had directed they kept on down the *avenida* so fast that it was useless to try to overtake them.

"It makes no difference; I shall send a boat there for them as soon as we reach the ship. Let us not keep them waiting."

The petty officer on the box had already sprung down and opened the door like a footman for Carlota to leave the carriage. She stepped down, her mind so full of her father, her aunt and her beloved that she completely forgot her jewel-case.

Kasevitch did not; tucking it under his left arm, with his right he gallantly guided Carlota down the dark stairs built in the thickness of the wall, steep-pitched and abruptly turning, that the Spanish pike-men and musketeers might the more easily defend the water-gate against a pirate escalade.

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By the landing at the foot of the steps floated the admiral's own black-and-gold steam-launch. No sooner were he, Carlota, and the three petty officers aboard than the launch got under way and darted out into the fire-lit harbor under a full head of steam.

It was as if they were speeding across a pool of blood. Behind them the ancient battlements of the sea-wall, the square bulk of the Palacio, the towers of the Cathedral and of the many churches stood black against the leaping flames beyond the battle still raging with undiminished fury.

Far to starboard stretched the dark length of the Marina Wharf. There thousands of frantic fugitives were fighting and bribing their way to the boats that were taking those who could pay the highest out to the British, Spanish, and German liners, the native coasters and the solitary Yankee clipper.

Beside the last lay another wooden sailing-vessel, heavily sparred, with a single funnel and a row of gun-ports along her black-painted hull—the United States man-of-war *Onondaga*.

Beyond the old-fashioned American warship and dwarfing every other vessel in the roadstead loomed the great Veraguan ironclad *El Vencedor*. She was Scotch-built and the pride of her builders: a hideously shaped and beautifully constructed monster of nearly five thousand tons.

She was so ultra modern and so wonderfully equipped that she actually had a single crude electric searchlight, which was just now being swung back and forth in an arc covering her port or shoreward side.

At the edge of the zone of light floated a dark, irregular crescent of tugs, rowboats, cargo-lighters, naphtha launches and even Indian dugouts, all crowded with people who were either shouting threats or screaming entreaties. Now and then some craft would dart forward a length or two, only to be driven back by stern commands and a spatter of rifle-fire from the ironclad's rail.

Great was the tumult and excitement when the admiral's well-known launch came whistling up. To her astonishment, Carlota recognized the voices and faces of many of her friends, their parents and brothers, their rich and poor relations, servants, and hangers-on. Twoscore at least of the so-called "Fifty Families" that between them nearly monopolized the wealth, white blood and politics of Veragua City were there, clamoring to be let aboard *El Vencedor*.

Silence fell as Kasevitch stepped out on the tiny foredeck of his launch and held up his hand. The searchlight operator, with the dramatic instinct of the Latin, focused his rays on the graceful figure, emphasizing every gold button of the white uniform, every hair of the neatly pointed black beard.

"Have the goodness, ladies and gentlemen, to wait for a very little longer," Kasevitch implored them in a melodious voice that all could hear. "As soon as the Presidential party are aboard you all will be fittingly accommodated without further delay."

To a delighted chorus of "*Viva el Condé!*" the admiral's launch rounded the ironclad's stern and, unseen by those in the crescent of waiting craft, came alongside the starboard gangway.

Reaching the deck, Carlota would have crossed at once to the port rail. But Kasevitch had again taken her arm and insisted on taking her below.

"It is past one o'clock and you are tired, Señorita Carlota. Let me escort you to my own poor cabin, which is now yours as long as you continue to honor this ship with your presence."

With a final bow and burst of compliments he left her at the door of the stateroom opening off the admiral's spacious quarters, which would now of course be occupied by the President as soon as he came aboard. Closing and bolting the door, Carlota looked at her bedroom and thought it ridiculously small, though it was really uncommonly large.

Instead of the usual berth there was a brass bedstead, covered with a counterpane of hand-made lace. Hanging above it was the full-length portrait of a beautiful young lady who had sat for her photograph without one atom of clothing on her shapely body.

Blushing to her toes, Carlota snatched a towel from the rack, plucked down the offending picture and dropped it and the towel together out of the open cabin deadlight. When her father came she would certainly have him give Don Juan a piece of his mind!

In the meanwhile, hardly daring to risk another look at the walls of the stateroom, she remained at the port-hole. Before her she could see the narrow mouth of the

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harbor, the sea beyond, and the old Spanish fort which guarded the entrance, and which her father had repaired and re-armed with modern guns. But there were no gunners there tonight; the garrison had been ordered into the city.

Ever Carlota's thoughts came back to the city and her father. Thinking of him, she did not notice that fort and headland were moving across her field of vision till her eyes were dazzled with firelight and she realized that she was looking, not at the harbor-mouth but at the Marina Wharf.

The ship had turned around—it was no longer at anchor. She could feel it moving beneath her—and her father had not yet come aboard. Kasevitch was leaving him behind and taking her—alone!

Too frightened to scream, Carlota darted across the stateroom, drew back the bolt and tried to open the door. It had been locked from the outside.

"FORGED! I gave him no such orders; I told him to land the other half of his crew and join me at the barricades. Instead he put to sea with all the treasure entrusted to his keeping—and my poor daughter! Oh, Carlota—Carlotita!"

Bowing his white head above the marble-topped table in the reception-room of the American Legation, Don Ignacio wept with the simplicity of a little child. Jimmy Merritt, pacing up and down the flowered carpet, was murmuring great oaths that were really prayers. Presently the old man was able to continue.

"The traitor fled because he felt assured of my overthrow, if not of my death, last night. But it was the loyal half of his own crew, the officers and men he dared not keep on board, whose guns mowed down the revolutionists while I with all the other forces at my disposal, moved out and struck them flank and rear. Unwarned, undisciplined, they were utterly overthrown.

"Prestán is dead; I am still President of Veragua. And I shall purge the land of the thieves and cowards who made my people revolt but dared not face their wrath.

"But Kasevitch, the vilest of them all, is beyond my reach. *El Vencedor* is the one modern vessel in our navy; the rest are ancient, worthless hulks. I can not overtake him and he knows it."

"But he can't cruise indefinitely in an ironclad of that type, Mr. President," said Jimmy Merritt. "He'll have to put in somewhere for coal and supplies. He can't play the pirate in this age of steam and cablegrams. The word has already gone out against him; sooner or later Kasevitch must give himself up to the authorities of some country, who will intern the ship and hold him for extradition."

"You forget the one country where there is neither cable-station nor extradition," Don Ignacio answered. "Kasevitch need only go to Velasco or any other port in the Republic of Equatan. Gomez, the Dictator of that country, is my bitterest enemy.

"Kasevitch will offer him a share of the millions he has on board, and Gomez will never give him up. If I go to war my army is already broken and demoralized, my capital likely to be blockaded and bombarded by my own ironclad—and my daughter is a hostage!

"But now while Kasevitch is still on the high seas in defiance of my orders he and all his ship's company are mutineers, whom any war-ship in the world can suppress or treat as pirates if they resist. So says international law.

"But no war-ship in the world is near enough to overtake or intercept *El Vencedor* between here and Velasco except the *Onondaga*. Therefore I galloped here myself without waiting to wash off the stains of battle, to ask your government to order her to pursue that criminal and prevent a war."

"I know, sir," nodded Jimmy Merritt. "I've sent my landing-party aboard. I'm only waiting here myself to take the orders to my skipper as soon as they come in over the Legation's private wire. You can see the smoke pouring out of the *Onondaga's* stack from here, sir—they're already raising steam. We'll need everything we've got to overhaul *El Vencedor*."

"It is a dangerous service I ask," observed Don Ignacio. "*El Vencedor* is a powerful ironclad while yours is a wooden ship. For that reason your government may well refuse."

"It might if it knew the difference, sir, but it doesn't," said the young American naval officer bitterly. "Twenty years ago the United States had the strongest navy in the world; today——"

He stopped as a little man wearing white

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duck and red burnsides hurried into the room. It was the American minister with a cablegram in each hand.

Unable to find his own Secretary of Foreign Affairs after last night's panic and ignoring the nonentity who was Veraguan *chargé* in Washington, Don Ignacio had upset all diplomatic precedent in his unheeding haste. They are still shaking their heads over that in Veragua City.

"A personal message from President Arthur to your Excellency," said the minister, handing one cablegram to Don Ignacio. "Lieutenant Merritt, here are Captain Birney's orders from the Navy Department—

"Overtake and compel *El Vencedor* to return to port."

"Thank God!" cried Jimmy Merritt, snatching the paper and turning to run out to the waiting cab that would take him to the Marina Wharf.

But Don Ignacio strode forward and grasped the two Americans by the hands.

"*Caballeros*," he said solemnly, "your country has wooden ships but it has men of steel!"

A RISING sea, a badly lighted coast and the untrustworthiness of his deck-officers compelled Kasevitch to remain on the bridge all that night and far into the next day. He consoled himself with the thought that no lady is good company when she is seasick.

When at last the admiral went below to his quarters he found a table set for two, as he had optimistically ordered. Unlocking the stateroom door, he knocked on the panel.

"May I have the honor of your company at luncheon, Señorita Carlota?"

"Go away!" came the defiant answer from within. "I will die before I open this door to you."

"Let me save you the trouble of doing either," replied Kasevitch, turning the knob and pulling it toward him.

The bolt fell tinkling on the floor; the screws securing it had been carefully filed and loosened. With feline cruelty he reclosed the door without as much as glancing inside, walked over to the table, seated himself and waited to see what his pretty prisoner would do next.

Ivan Kasevitch was feeling very well pleased with himself. In his private safe he had between eight and nine million dollars' worth of French, British and American bank-notes and negotiable securities, either entrusted to his keeping by rich Veraguans or given in payment for a promised passage north on his ship.

Two of the ironclad's magazines and the five-inch shell-room were filled with silver ingots and bars of gold from the Treasury and the banks. Locked and sealed in a guarded compartment below the waterline were the celebrated sacred vessels, images and jewels of the cathedral and the churches of Veragua City, including the priceless Emerald Rosary, secretly sent aboard to save them from the anti-Clerical Prestanistas.

Last but not least of the treasures were Carlota's jewels in the top drawer of the admiral's rosewood desk. No Spanish galleon of the old days ever put out from Veragua so richly laden as did *El Vencedor*.

"Whither are you taking me?"

Pale, trembling, scarcely able to stand because of her own weakness and the motion of the ship, Carlota stood supporting herself with one hand on the knob and the other on the casing of the stateroom door. But there was neither fear nor entreaty in her voice, and her great dark eyes glowed with hate and scorn.

"To the ends of the earth and all the pleasant places on the way," replied Kasevitch, sipping his liqueur. "To Paris, Vienna, even to St. Petersburg——"

"Wherever you go I shall denounce you!"

"Indeed! Tomorrow we shall be at Velasco in Equatan. Would you like to denounce me to those in authority there?

"Perhaps you have heard of Gomez the Dictator and what he does to the wives and daughters of those that displease him? I see that you have; but do not be afraid—I shall protect you."

"*You* protect me—you lying, cowardly traitor! You outcast cur, who bites the hand that fed him!

"You dare not keep me a prisoner here! This is still a Veraguan ship; her crew are sons of Veragua——"

"Pardon me; they are sons of Belial," purred Kasevitch. "Half of them are foreign-born rascals and the other half native riffraff, whom in my double capacity as Minister of Marine and commander of this ship I have selected personally and with the greatest care.

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"I foresaw the end of your father's rule and laid my plans accordingly. No one on board this ship would dare disobey me or try to interfere with my private pleasures.

"Yesterday, my dear Carlota, you were a President's daughter. Today, you are the pretty plaything of Ivan Kasevitch. I can do to you precisely what I please. For instance——"

A sharp rap sounded on the door of the admiral's quarters. Kasevitch snarled "Come in!" and a negroid native officer shuffled in.

"What the devil do you want?" demanded the Russian, ignoring the other's slovenly salute.

"To report that the *Onondaga* is coming up astern."

"Impossible. That old relic can not steam two knots to our three."

"Nevertheless she is overwhelming us fast," persisted the Veraguan stubbornly.

"A miracle!" cried Carlota, sinking to her knees and turning a radiant face to heaven. "The Blessed Virgin has heard my prayers and vouchsafed a miracle!"

ON THE face of it it was nothing less than a miracle. The new Clyde-built ironclad had made 14.37 knots at her speed-trials less than two years before, while the *Onondaga's* quaint old engines had never done better than nine since she was launched at the Charlestown Navy Yard in 1858. Both vessels had been docked and had their bottoms cleaned within three months, and both were burning good steam-coal.

Moreover *El Vencedor* was not only Scotch-built but she was, like many another Latin-American war-ship, what British and American seamen used to call a "Scotch man-o'-war." For if you hailed her in English there would be a brief period of silence, and then as soon as they could get the chief engineer on deck the answer would come back in good broad Scots.

But Mr. McNab, the chief, had always wanted to see how the new Hotchkiss revolving three-pounders would work in action, and so he had slipped ashore with that part of the crew who had been landed to help man the barricades. "Thirsty" Seymour, the second, had taken the chance to raid the chief's private locker, and was still sleeping off the result.

The nervous young native third had been on watch for seventeen consecutive hours, and most of his attention was being taken up with seeing that *El Vencedor's* big single screw did not race off when she pitched. His mind was so full of what would happen in that eventuality that he had been letting the oilers, firemen and trimmers do very much as they pleased. Consequently it was the ironclad that was making nine knots an hour while the American man-of-war was logging fourteen.

For the *Onondaga* had been built in the days when steam was second to sail. A full-rigged ship with a clipper hull, she was at her best on a day like this, with a three-reef breeze on her starboard quarter and perfect cooperation between engine-room and topsides.

Her engineer and deck-officers were masters of the delicate and now forgotten art of handling a ship under both steam and sail, making each help instead of hinder the other. Half-cruiser, half-frigate, the man-of-war was the daughter of the Old Navy and the mother of the New. Farragut had walked her quarter-deck, and carved on a beam in her low-ceiled steerage were the initials of Mr. Midshipman Sims.

Long strings of bright-colored little flags rose to the *Onondaga's* mastheads as she drew alongside and to windward of the laboring ironclad. Stalwart "bunting-tossers," lashed to the standing-rigging, wigwagged till their arms ached; leather-lunged officers shouted passable Spanish through old-fashioned speaking-trumpets. But without making the slightest acknowledgment or answer *El Vencedor* steamed insolently on.

Kasevitch had swiftly decided that that was the only course for him to follow. He had never dreamed that he would be thus pursued and overtaken on the way to Equatan nor that Don Ignacio's government could have survived.

Whether or not the Yankees were lying when they said this, Kasevitch had not the slightest intention of letting them take him back to Veragua. Whichever faction ruled there would certainly have him shot against the nearest blank wall—if he were not torn limb from limb by the tricked and infuriated Fifty Families as soon as he set foot on the Marina Wharf.

He would not return, and therefore he kept on. He ignored the *Onondaga's* signals and made no reply because it was the

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most prudent and at the same time the most insolent thing to do.

"Sir, her commander refuses to acknowledge or answer our communications," Jimmy Merritt reported formally to Captain Birney.

"Then I'll speak to him in plain sea-language!" cried that indignant veteran of Mobile Bay. "Beat to quarters! Cast loose and provide the forward pivot-gun!"

Kasevitch smiled as a cloud of powder-smoke and the boom of a blank discharge came down the wind. He had looked forward to this, for he knew Captain Birney's temper almost as well as he did the *Onondaga's* obsolete armament of smooth-bore muzzle-loaders.

The smile broadened as an eleven-inch solid shot from the Dahlgren pivot-gun crossed his bows. Then came a mighty clang and Kasevitch burst out laughing. The second solid shot had struck squarely against the ironclad's armored side and rebounded harmlessly into the sea.

It was most amusing. Let the ridiculous old Yankee blaze away with his ridiculous old guns until both he and they grew red hot and burst. What harm could they possibly do to Kasevitch and *El Vencedor?*

She was an ironclad of the then popular "citadel" type; unarmored at bow and stern, but with her vitals and main battery enclosed in a great box of ten-inch compound armor, extending from the waterline to the top of the superstructure. Her secondary battery of Hotchkiss and Gatling guns had been sent ashore, but she still carried her main armament of two ten-inch and ten five-inch rifles; long, modern breech-loaders that could blow the *Onondaga* to splinters with one well-placed shell.

But Kasevitch had no intention of doing anything so unnecessary. To ignore the attack was far safer for him from a legal standpoint, and far more humiliating for Captain Birney. What an after-dinner story this would make, thought Kasevitch, after the affair had blown over and he could return to—

Crash! Another solid shot had struck, and this time the sound of its arrival came from within instead of without *El Vencedor.* Shrieks, oaths, and the rattle of pistol-shots came up through the fireroom hatch. Leaping to the voice-tube, Kasevitch demanded information.

"Hit No. 5 bunker," gabbled the voice of the third engineer. "One trimmer killed by the shot—two others shut in and drowned when we closed the water-tight doors. Fire-room in a panic—I can not hold them if this occurs again. How could it happen, below the water-line?"

"And below the armor-belt, fool!" snarled Kasevitch. "Can't you feel how we are rolling? The Yankees are cleverer than I thought; they are aiming at the red paint and have had the luck to hit it. Even their old smooth-bores can pierce thin plating."

"Then make them stop," screamed the engineer. "I warn you, I can not keep my men below if you don't."

Scowling, Kasevitch hesitated a moment. To fight a United States war-ship, even in self-defense, would be piracy, open and avowed. But, even worse than the firing-squad awaiting him if he gave up and returned, was the humiliation of yielding to the feeble old *Onondaga* after he had so often and so publicly made a mock of her.

If he could beat her off and then escape to Equatan he would secretly offer the Yankee government a sufficiently large share of his plunder. He was far too clever and sophisticated to believe that so reasonable an offer could possibly be refused.

"Prepare to rotate the forward turret!" he shouted down the voice-tube to the engineer, at the same time pressing a button.

Throughout the ship electric gongs sounded the call to battle-stations. Bugles sounded, officers cursed, and the swarthy gun-crews and shell-passers pattered nimbly to their stations. Every man of them had been promised his percentage of the loot if they reached Velasco, and all had supreme faith in the invulnerability of *El Vencedor.* When she showed fight how quickly the Yankee pigs would turn and run!

"Turn forward turret forty degrees to starboard," commanded Kasevitch through the voice-tube.

Looking down from the bridge, he saw the great circular mass of steel directly before and beneath him rise several inches in the air, start to turn to the right and then abruptly stop and drop back to the deck with a shock that shook the ship. From below came the crash of breaking gears and the agitated babbling of the native engineer.

"Imbecile! Drunkard! Son of ten million generations of criminal lunatics!"

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roared Kasevitch with much more to the same effect in Spanish, Russian and five other languages. "You forgot to drive in the wedges!"

The naval turret of the period rested, when not in use, on a circular groove level with the deck. But in action it was carried and turned upon a vertical wrought-iron column, extending down to the lower deck, where it was rooted in a powerful hydraulic ram.

This lifted column and turret till the latter's lower edge was clear of the groove, the joint being hidden and guarded by a massive coaming. Then four steel wedges, shaped like the four quarters of a squash pie, were driven in beneath the base of the column, making a firm foundation on which the turret could then be revolved by a set of steam-driven gears beneath its floor.

The overworked and overexcited native engineer had tried to rotate the turret while it was still supported and being lifted by the ram, which promptly gave way, stripping the gears and making a "dock-yard job" of the whole mechanism.

El Vencedor had not a gun to bear. The forward ten-inch was boxed up in a jammed and useless turret; the after big gun could not quite reach the *Onondaga's* stern.

The five five-inchers on either broadside of the "box-battery" amidships could have blown the old man-of-war out of the water with one salvo—if they had only had the shells to fire a salvo with! But there was nothing in the five-inch shell-room but silver ingots and bars of gold.

In the meanwhile the *Onondaga* kept pounding away with solid shot at the softer parts of *El Vencedor*. Cast-iron spheres weighing from eighty to two hundred pounds apiece can do a lot of damage to funnels, ventilators, life-boats, cranes, deck-fittings and the human anatomy. Worst of all was the wreck they made of Admiral Count Ivan Kasevitch's patience, temper and disposition.

The *Onondaga* had ceased to be a joke; she was getting to be an intolerable nuisance, to say the least! Though she could not sink *El Vencedor*, she was certainly mussing her up and spoiling her proud beauty.

Kasevitch had counted on the splendor of her newly painted black hull and elaborate gold scrollwork at bow and stern no less than he did on her great guns and massive armor to impress the Equatanian mind. It would never do to arrive looking like a battered fugitive, ignominiously pursued and pelted by a ridiculously feeble foe.

Resolved to get rid of the *Onondaga* at once and unable to use his guns, Kasevitch resorted to what was then the newest weapon in naval warfare.

JIMMY MERRITT was the first to sight the white wake of the oncoming torpedo and one of the few on board who was able to recognize it for what it was. A graduate of the Torpedo School at Newport, he realized that before the *Onondaga* could alter her course she would be struck just abaft the engine-room and in all probability sent to the bottom.

At the same time he remembered how the Peruvian ironclad *Huascar* in 1879 had been saved from almost certain destruction when one of her own torpedoes had turned around and was coming back to blow up its owners, by the quick-witted and gallant act of one of her officers. Like him, Jimmy dived overboard.

Luckily he had been standing forward at the time. Taking off near the bows, he rose to the surface to find himself nearly abreast the funnel and almost directly in the course of the torpedo. Rising on the crest of a wave, he again saw the white wake of exhaust and caught the coppery gleam of the war-head in the green translucent heart of the wave beyond. Racing down the opposite slopes, the two met in the trough of the sea.

The torpedo of 1883 was only the primitive ancestor of the perfected Whitehead or Schwartzkopf of today. Its speed was nearer fourteen than forty knots. It was an eccentric little thing without a gyroscope to hold it on its course or a reducing-valve to keep its compressed-air engine from alternately spurting and lagging or a servo-motor to help the hydrostatic valve control the horizontal rudders and maintain the same depth throughout the run. Instead of ten feet *El Vencedor's* torpedo was a bare eighteen inches below the surface when Jimmy Merritt threw himself upon it and clasped its war-head to his bosom.

Exactly what happened after that neither Jimmy nor any one else could ever tell. Apparently the weight of his body depressed the torpedo's nose, while the drag of his

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trailing legs swerved it off its course. It dived until Jimmy's lungs seemed about to burst. A tremendous, rhythmic throbbing beat on his ears like blows.

Opening his eyes and looking toward his own wake, he saw the myriad little bubbles of the torpedo's exhaust ballooning up toward a green and troubled firmament, where floated a monstrous black something with a thrashing tail. Realizing that this last must be the *Onandaga's* propeller and that if he rose too soon he would be slashed to pieces by its blades, Jimmy hung on.

But the deeper they went the harder and farther the increased pressure of the water shoved the little push-button in the open tube of the hydrostatic valve and the more insistently the springs and levers inside the balance-chamber tugged at the torpedo's horizontal rudders, till up went their forward edges, and the miniature submarine ceased diving and began to rise. Faster and faster it rushed toward the surface till it broached like a playful porpoise up through the creamy wake of the steamer into the open air.

At that point Jimmy Merritt and the torpedo parted company. The latter sped uselessly out to sea; the former floated and drew air into his aching lungs until he felt like swimming to the nearest of the dozen or so life-preservers and gratings that had been thrown over for his benefit. Ducking under and coming up inside the big cork ring, Jimmy tucked it comfortably under his armpits and looked at the two ships.

"Ding dong it!" he swore disgustedly. "The Old Man's going to pick me up and let that —— pirate get away!"

Sooner than let Kasevitch escape, Jimmy would gladly have stayed where he was and taken his chances with the sharks or anything else that might befall. So would Captain Birney have felt if he had been in Jimmy's place; being still on his own quarter-deck, he had backed his topsails and reversed his engines. While the *Onondaga's* headway was still perilously great, down dropped the port cutter, escaped swamping by the smartest of smart handling and sped with swinging oars over the mile of empty water astern.

Boom! Something screamed above the *Onondaga's* maintruck. Far to windward a tall white fountain spouted suddenly above the waves. A cloud of powder-smoke floated away to leeward from the after-deck of *El Vencedor.*

Drawing ahead, the ironclad was now able to use her great stern gun. Unlike the forward ten-inch it was mounted not in a turret but a barbette, which was much the same sort of thing except that it had no roof and was fixed instead of rotating.

Its long brown barrel sticking out over the top of this little circular steel fortress, the gun itself was further guarded by a heavy shield attached to its carriage and revolving with it. If it had been as well served as it was protected that gun would have sunk or dismasted the *Onondaga* in five minutes at the most.

But in eleven rounds it scored ten splashes and one hit—a neat round hole through the *Onondaga's* foretopgal'nts'l. Jimmy Merritt stopped worrying about sharks; if there had been any about they were certainly all frightened out of the neighborhood by this time.

"Did you ever see such rotten gunnery?" he shouted as the port cutter drew up alongside and they lifted him over the rail. "I'll bet that thief of a Kasevitch just pocketed the money it would have cost instead of giving his men any target-practise!

"Yes, I'm all right—nothing carried away. Thanks all the same, though."

"What in —— are you thanking us for?" growled the gray-haired second luff in charge of the boat. "You've saved the *Onondaga* and probably every man jack aboard. Captain Birney's going to recommend you for the Medal of Honor."

"He'd better bring me up on charges instead," answered Jimmy. "For I haven't saved anything. If I'd stayed aboard and let that torpedo hit us nothing would have happened, for it couldn't possibly have exploded."

"Why not?" demanded the older man, whose professional knowledge had stopped growing in 1865.

"Because the striker-rod was locked fast—the yellow-bellied idiots forgot to release the safety catch before placing the torpedo in the tube. Saw it when we came to the surface together.

"Did you ever see such a pack of blithering incompetents? Old Don Ignacio only said half the truth!"

"What did he say?"

"That we had a wooden ship but men of steel——"

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"And we're fighting a steel ship with wooden men," guffawed the veteran. "The fellow's ceased firing—he's coming about. Is he going to give in and put back to port?"

"No," shouted Jimmy Merritt. "He's going to ram."

LIKE a charging rhinoceros at a hunter, *El Vencedor* bore down on the *Onondaga*. Dense clouds of smoke poured from the ironclad's funnels and trailed astern like pirate flags as she headed directly into the wind. There was no menace in her forward gun, glaring askew from its useless turret; her weapon was herself.

Beneath her black bows, crowned with gleaming gold, her stem curved down to a long, sharp under-water ram. Backed by five thousand tons of steel, it would crash through the ribs and planking of the old man-of-war like a plowshare through a cigar-box.

Broadside-on to her fearful foe, the *Onondaga* rolled in the trough of the sea, her engines idle, her canvas flapping wildly. Men swarmed up her shrouds or ran about on deck in seeming panic.

"They're waiting to pick us up," cried Jimmy Merritt. "Stretch to it, men, for God's sake!"

The older officer beside him, who should have given the command, said nothing. Before his eyes *El Vencedor* had changed to another ironclad, flying the Stars and Bars, the *Onondaga* to another Yankee man-of-war, helplessly but defiantly awaiting the death-blow. It was going to be the *Merrimac* and the *Cumberland* all over again.

Even as the *Cumberland* had done, the *Onondaga* now fired a broadside, both pivots and the entire port battery blazing away together. But how could the hunter hope to kill or cripple the rhinoceros with an old-fashioned smooth-bore incapable of piercing the monster's hide?

Rebounding from the steel protective deck, one of the round shot flew high in the air, carromed off the forward military mast and dropped on the bridge. One glance at its sputtering fuse told Kasevitch and the others there that this was no solid shot but an old-time bomb-shell.

The traditional thing in most navies was for the man nearest to such a visitor to pick it up and drop it overboard without delay. But the Veraguan Navy had no such traditions, nor did any one on the bridge try to establish that kind of a precedent now.

From the admiral to the quartermaster at the wheel everybody concentrated on getting himself to a safe distance before the shell went off. It completely wrecked both bridge and chartroom, but there were no casualties.

Wheel, binnacle, voice-tubes and engine-room telegraph were a total loss. But there was another complete set of controls inside the conning-tower, just abaft the smoldering wreckage of what had been the bridge.

There Kasevitch prudently withdrew with twelve inches of steel-faced compound armor to shield him on every side. Bidding the quartermaster hold her steady, the admiral and the negroid native officer peered through the narrow slits in the rounded forward face of the conning-tower.

"Curse the smoke!" swore Kasevitch.

The richly varnished woodwork of *El Vencedor's* ornate bridge and chartroom, shattered and set on fire by the exploding shell, was now blazing merrily. The head wind combined with the draft created by the ship's own progress to fan the flames and drive the smoke in through the peep-holes of the tower.

"Lay forward the fire-brigade. Turn a hose on that burning wreckage," ordered Kasevitch through the appropriate voice-tube.

But his men were even less anxious than himself to expose themselves just then on the forward deck. Another broadside and another from the *Onondaga* seemed to fill the air with bursting shells. The third and last salvo swept the ironclad's topsides with a hissing storm of grape and canister.

So near were the two ships that the smoke of this last discharge mingled with that of the shell-explosions and the reek of the *Onondaga's* funnel to obscure still further the outlook through the deep, narrow slots. Unable to make out anything himself, Kasevitch turned to the officer beside him—and discovered the negroid lying dead at his feet. A random grape-shot had entered the peep-hole, piercing his eye and brain.

The hunter had blinded the rhinoceros, but its charge was still unchecked. A glance at the compass told Kasevitch that the helmsman had been holding *El Vencedor* on her course.

He himself had already signaled "Stop,"

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and "Full Speed Astern," that the ram might not be driven in too hard to make it difficult to withdraw. At any instant now the collision should come.

The shock of a sudden impact ran through the ironclad's frame. Yet it was much less than Kasevitch had expected, and altogether different from what his imagination had pictured.

Returning to the peep-hole, he looked out. The smoke was thinning and eddying now, and he caught a glimpse of *El Vencedor's* bows—and open water beyond!

Could they have ridden clear over the *Onondaga?* It had not felt like a sinking ship bumping against the ironclad's keel; it was more—Saint Basil! It was like another ship coming alongside!

Tugging open the massive conning-tower door, Kasevitch rushed out on deck. One look to starboard told him what Captain Birney had done.

Skilfully bringing the *Onondaga's* head up into the wind as *El Vencedor* bore blindly down upon him, he had made the blow a glancing one, thrown boat-anchors and grapnels, and lashed the two vessels together side by side. Already a dozen Yankee bluejackets had sprung aboard the *Veraguan*, and were making fast to her bitts the hawsers thrown from the *Onondaga's* deck.

Springing back into his conning-tower, Kasevitch pressed the signal for "All hands on deck." Drawing his sword and revolver, he ran down to lead his men himself.

"Overboard with them!" he shouted. "Cast off those grapnels—cut the lines!"

"Out cutlasses!" rang an answering command from the *Onondaga*. "Stand by to board! Boarders away!"

Roaring with joy and brandishing their brass-hilted blades, the brawny crew of the man-of-war swarmed over the ironclad's rail. Sword in hand, gray-headed Captain Birney went over the side as nimbly as the youngest "reefer."

Officers and seamen, bearded old shellbacks and pink-cheeked apprentices, scrambled and sprang together regardless of rank, each thinking only of being the first. A flying wedge of marines bayoneted a path for themselves across *El Vencedor's* quarter-deck, scaled the steel wall of her after barbette like cats and threw themselves on the squealing gun-crew within as terriers leap down into a crowded rat-pit.

The "foreign-born rascals and native riffraff" whom Kasevitch had himself selected, "personally and with the greatest care," were not the sort to meet an attack like this. Flinging down their weapons, they either threw up their hands or fled. The boarding-party turned from point and edge to gun-butt and the flat of the blade—also the toe of the boot.

Kasevitch alone reached a sliding steel door in time to close and hook it in the face of his pursuers. Safe for the moment, he ran aft to his own quarters, locked himself in and strode over to the stateroom to find Carlota and hold her as a hostage for his own life.

But just as he was about to seize her wrist and drag her forth Kasevitch heard a startling crash behind him. Turning, he saw the beautiful hardwood door of his outer cabin torn from its hinges and flat on the cabin floor. Sprawling on top of it lay the long body of Jimmy Merritt, soaking wet and streaked with coal-dust and ashes.

PULLING their hearts out, the crew of the port cutter had come up in time for the tail end of the fight, if they could only find a way up the tall black side of *El Vencedor*. Pointing his pistol at a frightened face looking down at them from the open ash-hoist, the resourceful second luff ordered him to throw them a line.

The terrified trimmer obeyed; while the rest of the *Onondaga's* men were coming over the ironclad's starboard rail the boat's crew made their own private entrance and attack below and to port. Much to their disgust, the "Black Gang" and the engine-room put up no fight at all.

Seeking Carlota, Jimmy had reached the upper deck just in time to see Kasevitch speeding aft. Realizing that the Russian would be keeping the girl a prisoner in his own quarters, he had followed without delay.

Before Jimmy could rise Kasevitch aimed his revolver at him and pulled the trigger. The hammer fell on an empty shell; the admiral had fired all six shots in a vain attempt to turn back his own breaking and demoralized forces.

There was no time now for him to reload. Dropping the useless pistol as Jimmy rose, Kasevitch sprang forward to cut him down with his sword.

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But the blow was turned by a lightning parry that Jimmy made with the boat-stretcher in his hand. He had unbuckled his sword-belt and left the hampering weapon behind when he dived overboard to stop the torpedo.

Unwilling to deprive any member of the boat's crew of his cutlas or pistol, Jimmy had armed himself with one of the stretchers—a stout hickory stick about two feet long officially used as a brace for an oarsman's feet; unofficially, as an exceedingly handy club.

A master of the single-stick, Jimmy met and turned the swordsman's vicious rain of cuts and lunges. He was much more at home with this sort of thing in his hand than he would have been with his clumsy, ill-balanced service sword.

Skilfully saving his unguarded fingers, he kept on the defensive, letting the other wear himself out. Ever the wooden club met the steel at an angle that made the latter glance off without a chance to cut through; never could the furious, cursing Kasevitch reach the agile body or the hateful brown face before him.

Wasting his breath, and wasted with evil living, he could not stand the pace. His thrusts were slower—before he could recover from the last lunge his opponent made a swift, strong counter, striking the flat of the outstretched blade with all the force of his powerful wrist.

The steel snapped, broken in two by the blow of the hickory club. Another blow, and Kasevitch lay limp and still on the cabin floor.

"Jaime!"

From where she had been watching the two men fight Carlota ran to her lover and fell half-fainting on his breast.

"Jaime, have you killed him?"

"No, only stunned him. He is still alive."

"I am so glad!" murmured Carlota as Jimmy took her into his arms.

But Kasevitch, when presently he opened the eyes in his aching head and saw the lovers standing there; Kasevitch, as he heard the footsteps of those who were coming to take him away in irons, and as he thought of the dungeons of Veragua City and the vengeance of Don Ignacio—Admiral Count Ivan Kasevitch was not at all glad that he was still alive!

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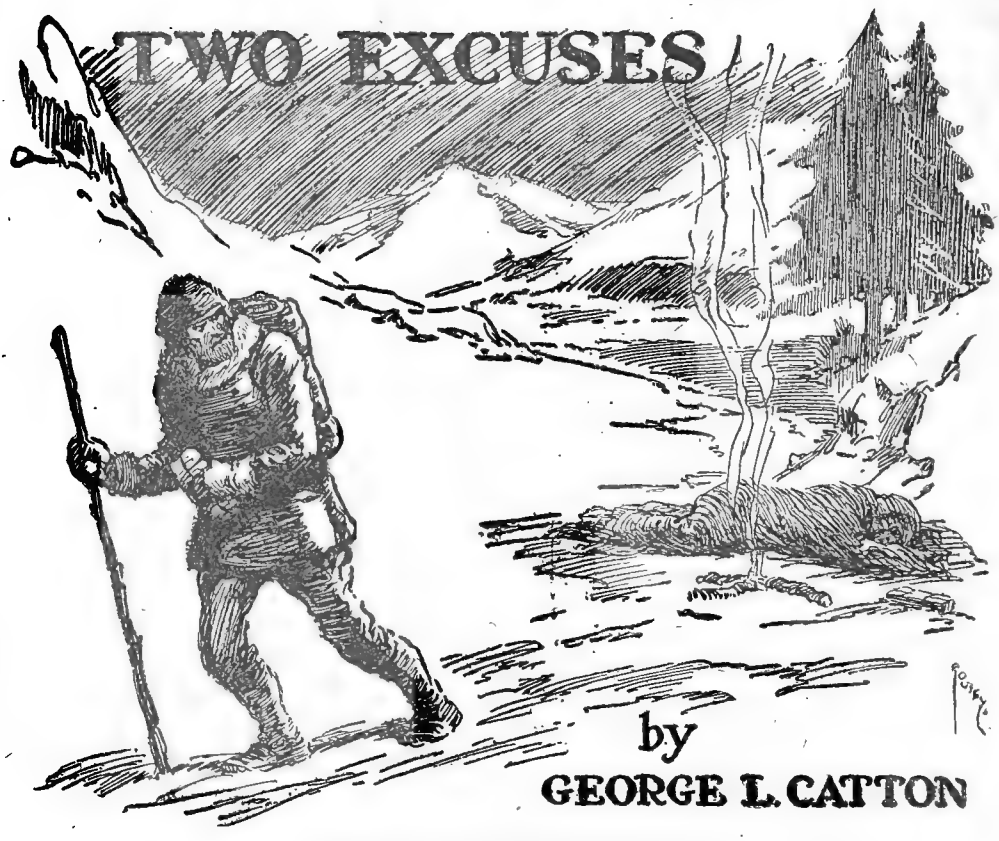

Author of "Not Yet," "Merely Brute," etc.

A SOUTHERNMOST sun edged up on a vague horizon, hung briefly and settled slowly back. The great emerald stars in the infinite blue dome of the sky quivered, shivered. The long tongues of the Aurora Borealis streamed high, hissing, seething to their zenith and faded out. The alcohol tube at Circle City registered sixty-eight below.

Life was not; nothing moved, nothing breathed, nothing lived on the endless reaches of the silent snows. On that vast blanket of white death only the frost existed —a million glittering, gleaming diamond-points of ice. The world lay stark, dead.

The big man ripped the odd blanket in equal halves and spread them out by the fire. He reached for the two haversacks and sorted out their contents. He rolled up two little packs. Then he snapped testily:

"Here's where we unload. Right here is where we peel down to the grub and the gold. According to the map we're eighty-odd miles from Circle, and I'm —— near all in now. From here on, we're not toting any junk. Life's sweet."

The little man on the other side of the fire glanced out over the silent white waste and nodded slowly. He realized that his partner was right. Famished and trail-worn as they were and with barely enough for one good meal apiece, those eighty-odd miles of struggle between life and death would demand of them their reserves of strength and will-power to the very last gasp. Non-essentials; weight in the packs not immediately a necessity to life must be left behind. He agreed with the big man's assertion of "Life's sweet" with a weary nod of his head and two words—

"Aye, 'tis."

"And if we're going to make it at all," the big man went on, "we've got to travel light and fast." He sat back on his heels and slapped the two little packs. "There's four pairs of socks and the dust in that pack;

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that's your share of the load. The grub's in this other bundle; we won't be eating again till tomorrow night, so I'm packing it now. I'll carry that. That's all we'll take, and the weight and bulk are divided about even.

"Now—" he held out his watch— "we'll take eight hours rest. I'll sleep the first watch. Keep the fire roaring and call me at one o'clock." He rolled up in his blanket.

The little man laid the watch on his mitts on the snow between his feet and stared into the fire. He had four hours—four hours in which to think—four hours in which to decide. In one of those two little bundles on the other side of the fire were four pairs of socks and a double handful of gold-dust, and in the other—

The little man turned his head and looked back over a hundred and forty miles of ice-bound trail—six days of endless grind through a lifeless waste—a strength-sapping period of slow starvation. He cursed. Behind him in that silent graveyard he had ground out his life in a supreme effort to retain that life. And now, was he to lose it?

Ahead of him—he turned back to the fire and stared across it, across those glittering eighty-odd miles to Circle City and life. Ahead of him, away to the south where the sun had edged up and dropped back, in Ohio, a woman and two little sons were waiting, waiting.

They were waiting for him—and he couldn't make it. The little man brought his eyes back to the fire—back to the two little packs in the snow, and his teeth met in a rasping grind. Calling to him across the thousands of miles through the Winter's night were a woman and two little boys. And he couldn't reach them.

There wasn't the faintest of hope in his heart that the two of them, the big man and himself there in the snow, could reach Circle City. They were two famished men. There were eighty miles to cover. In that little pack in the snow there was hardly enough food for one.

"But I could make it," the little man's lips met in a grim whisper. "I could make it if—if I took it all."

Across the fire the big man growled in his sleep; snarled in his dreams at the muscle-cramp and the ache of fatigue.

For a full four hours the little man fed the fire and watched absently the glowing sparks. He gave the big man his full half of the eight-hour rest. Then, with the ending of those four hours, the little man decided.

"No. I've a woman and two kids waiting for me and he's alone in the world, but——"

His low whisper fell to a whine, the whine of the excuse-maker. He was making an excuse to his gnawing stomach, to his exhausted body, to his love of life. He whined:

"Only half of that food is mine. The other half belongs to him."

Then he awoke the big man.

The big man rolled his blanket and sat down beside the fire. The little man's problem had been his problem, too. But, unlike his partner, he had solved that problem when it first presented itself. On the trail, the day previous, he had thrashed it out and decided. He had known his decision when he packed those two little packs and, regardless of their similarity of shape and size and wrapper, he knew, without a chance of mistake, which was which.

A half-hour after the little man rolled himself in his blanket, almost as soon as he was asleep, the big man, the little man's partner of a year, was facing toward Circle City. Behind him he left one of the two little packs.

THE big man made thirty-two miles. Across thirty-two miles without a stop he dragged his weary feet through the glittering diamond-points of frost. For eleven consecutive hours, without a rest, he faced toward Circle and a chance to live. Then, all in a heap, he went down in the snow.

The big man was finished and he knew it. The searching cold was finding the thin stream of life in his exhausted body. Sleep, that deadly drowsiness of the frost, closed his eyes. He felt for the little pack he had dropped in the snow and found it, but he didn't try to open it. He knew what it contained.

And then—then with his last conscious breath he whined—the whine of the excuse-maker. He was making an excuse to his physical body that didn't want to die—to his love for life, for the decision he had made. He whined:

"I could have made it with the other pack, but—I'm alone in the world. And he—he's got a wife and couple of kids."

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The WEAKNESS of MEN

by Clyde B. Hough

Author of "Head-Hunters and Gold," "Justice," etc.

"NEVER heard of Midway," I protested. "What is it? Where is it?"

Sergeant Holman looked at me with withering pity and mixed reproach. I had interrupted him at the very beginning of a tale. But Holman is a good old sport and he proceeded to turn some light on my poor, dark brain.

MIDWAY (he said) is a very small island—just a little white dot—out near the middle of the Pacific Ocean, about fifteen hundred miles west from 'Frisco and a little better 'an a thousand miles north'ards of Honolulu. There's a cable-station—relay for power, transmission or somethin'—which works eighteen or twenty employees, and the government keeps a military guard out there—twenty enlisted men, an officer and a doctor. That's all. No natives.

The detachment I was there with went out in February 19—and they were a whole-hearted, rough-and-ready lot of good fellows. I was first-duty sergeant and a husky, well-set-up young fellow by the name of Dahl was second-duty sergeant. He was clean and quick to learn—had been made sergeant before he was two years in the corps.

When we first saw Midway from the deck of the transport it looked like a lot of drift—wreckage of somethin' floatin' on the water. Then when we got a little closer there was a dull boomin'; and still nearer in we learned that this boomin' was wave-beatin' against the reef. The reef is the only protection that Midway has; it forms a circle plumb around the island and knocks the bottom out of all the heavy rollers which would scatter that little sand-dune all over the ocean if they ever hit it full force.

Well, along about noon the transport hove in as close to the entrance in the reef as she could and lowered one of her small boats. The first sergeant picked a detail of eight privates and Dahl and me to go ashore with him.

We climbed down into the small boat and started. When we first got inside the reef the water was deep and blue-green just like outside. But we hadn't gone far before it changed to a light blue. That means shallow water, and the sandy bottom was plain to be seen, though it was covered in lots of places with coral.

Some of the coral grew like great boulders almost to the surface of the water, which made it pretty risky steerin' through 'em. So the first sergeant, who was handlin' the tiller, told Dahl and me to get up in the bow of the boat and watch for these hunks of coral and tell him how to steer clear of 'em.

Pretty soon I noticed Dahl leanin' over the gunwale and lookin' down at the bottom. Some places the coral looked like patches of shrubbery, even like small trees with branches all different colors, some of it green, some blue, some white and once in a while a streak of pink.

And all through this you could see fish of

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as many different colors as the coral, shootin' and dodgin' around like gold-fish in a jar. Dahl looked up at me once and his brown eyes were shinin' and his breath was comin' quick.

"Here's an impressionable youngster," I says to myself, and I didn't think any more about it at the time because we reached the island just then and I was too busy takin' that in.

Midway is about five miles in circumference and low—all sand, no soil and just a scrub magnolia-bush here and there, whipped by the wind and riddled by flyin' sand. The highest dune on the island, if I remember, was forty-five feet.

There were several other elevations, but on the whole it was just a flat stretch of sand. The reef around it was less than half a mile offshore in some places and at others it was ten to fifteen miles away.

The place didn't look a bit encouragin' when we landed. The bunch that we were relievin' had been pretty much warped by lonesomeness. Some of 'em wouldn't even speak to one another; and they'd let everything go to pieces somethin' awful.

Their tents were all torn by the wind and coated with sand, which they seemed never to have dusted off the whole six months they'd been there. And they were a shabby-lookin' lot themselves, runnin' around barefooted with nothin' on but an undershirt apiece and a pair of old dingy white pants.

"Holman," said Dahl after we'd looked that outfit over, "it's easy to see what's happened here. Idle, lonesome, homesick, nothin' to occupy 'em and nobody to hold 'em together, so they've turned against one another. Holman," he goes on, "let's you and me see that it don't happen to our bunch. The first sergeant'll be busy with other things of course, but you and me'll have time a plenty to think up stunts—not work but stunts—things to keep everybody occupied and cheerful; in good condition."

"Son," says I, "I'll shake with you on that—and we'll do it; it's good stuff, comin' from a youngster who's less than three years in the corps."

WELL, we were kept good and busy for about ten days fixin' things up and gettin' the place to look a little like white men lived there. First we pitched our tents—new ones that we'd brought out with us—two rows, five on each side, leavin' a nice wide company street between. Dahl was in charge on one side and me on the other.

Then we overhauled all the supplies and recovered them with tarpaulin. Next came the boats—we had two of 'em; one cutter and one whale-boat. And after they'd been all painted and made shipshape we began to sniff around our new home to see what it looked like.

There was plenty of room inside the reef for rowin' and sailin'. But the greatest sport was the fishin'. You could have 'most any kind of fishin' you wanted at Midway except trout-fishin'. You could fish with a hook and line and when you got tired of that you could try a seine—the cable people had one that we were welcome to use any time—and if that didn't satisfy you, you just took a rifle and went out to the outer reef, where they run near the surface, and shot 'em by the dozens.

Well, after about two months of fishin' and rowin' and sailin' the boats, the novelty wore off of it all and things began to go a bit humdrum and the men got a little quarrelsome; not serious, you understand, but it was a bad spirit to let run—we still had nearly four months to stay on the island. So Dahl and me decided it was time for us to begin figurin' out some stunts like we agreed to do in the beginnin'.

It was after supper one evenin' when we started talkin' it over, and we took a walk around the island to make our plans without being bothered. Naturally, we figured out a number of different things, but finally worked out the idea of a swimmin'-match. The weather's never very hot nor very cold at Midway and you can go swimmin' the year around.

Our plan to start the ball rollin' was for Dahl to make me a fake bet that he could pick a man on his street who could outswim any man on my street.

By the time the scheme was figured out we'd reached the eastern side of the island just opposite camp. The moon showed above the horizon like a white-hot disk and laid a silver span across the dark water. Dahl turned toward the moon and drew a long breath.

"Good ——, Holman," he said, "how can they get grouchy and tired of this? Just to breathe this air makes me glad clean to my toes."

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He swept his arm around as if to take it all in—the low stretch of sand, ghostly white under the moon, the dark water, the silver span and the blinkin' stars above. 'Course I never would've paid any attention to the natural-beauty stuff if it hadn't been for the way it acted on Dahl. I'm not like that; and for a little I began to wonder if Dahl really was the he-man I'd always thought him to be.

But then I remembered that night in Vallejo when he came up from under three big rough-necks and scrambled to his feet and put 'em out with a punch apiece. Then he walked over and helped settle the two that had me down.

No; it was not softness that made Dahl talk and look the way he was doin' now. It was just the cleanness in him answerin' back to the cleanness all around him.

I went on to camp and left him there starin' off across the water with shinin' eyes. I think the swimmin'-race, and the men too for that matter, were plumb out of his head just then. That's how impressionable he was.

NEXT day Dahl and me started an argument over who was the best swimmer in the detachment. The night before we'd planned to do it that way, and of course we made shore that a lot of the men could hear us. Then when we'd argued what seemed to be enough, Dahl sprung the bet and I took him right away.

We counted on that bet to get interest, and it did. Before two hours everybody in camp was talkin' about the swimmin'-race; and little by little Dahl and me, each workin' on his own side, got up a good, stiff rivalry between the two streets.

Pretty nearly every man in camp wanted to swim in the race. So the training and the trial races started at once.

Well, after about two weeks the trials had cut the crowd that started down to two men —Dahl from his street and a big, rangy fellow named Feeley from my side. Then we set a day for the race. By this time everybody in the detachment was pullin' for one man or the other and they were as happy as a bunch of fans at a baseball game.

We got two cable men to come over and act as judges so there'd be no chance of any partiality. Then we had some of the men row one of the boats out a half a mile and anchor it. The swimmers were to start from the beach, swim around the anchored boat and turn and come back. That would make it a mile race.

Dahl and Feeley lined up beside an old wreck, which was half-buried in sand a little ways back from the water, and then the first sergeant fired a single shot from his revolver. Feeley was a faster runner than Dahl and he hit the water a couple of paces ahead. Then they lengthened out and settled to their strokes. Feeley was almost the length of his body ahead, and he held that lead for about a quarter of a mile. After that Dahl pulled up even. But as they made the turn around the boat Feeley managed to gain a bit, and when they straightened out and started pullin' for the beach Feeley was head and shoulders in the lead.

It was then that Dahl began throwin' in somethin' which he seemed to've been holdin' back, and pretty soon he was even and about half-way in he shot ahead.

I don't know what bothered Feeley. Maybe it discouraged him to see Dahl get ahead. Whatever it was, he began to fall back, and the cheerin' from my street sort of choked up, then died down altogether, and Dahl scrambled up the beach a good twenty paces ahead. He wasn't even breathin' hard.

The excitement of the swimmin'-race had shore done all that we expected for the two weeks that it lasted. But when it was all over it left a twist in the situation that we hadn't expected. The men had nothin' to fall back on, and the bottom dropped out of their high spirits. It was still three months before we'd be relieved, and it shore looked like we were in a fair way for trouble.

Then by pure accident Dahl started somethin' that got 'em all goin' again. He decided to make himself a cribbage-board out of a piece of hard oak from the old wreck down on the beach. We had a saw, a plane, a brace-and-bit and such common tools.

Dahl cut a nice piece of oak, drilled two double rows of holes, planed it off to a proper thickness and started to polish it. First he scraped it with broken glass, next he scoured it with sand, and then for a week worked with his bare hands; and when he quit it was certainly a beauty, smooth as a mirror. To look at it was to almost believe that it was covered with some wonderful, live skin.

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When the rest of the crowd saw this, they decided it would be some souvenir to take home, so everybody made a rush for the old wreck to get a piece of hard oak. They ripped and tore at that old hull till everything above ground was taken off; and every man in the camp was making a cribbage-board the next day.

Then Dahl got the idea to make another cribbage-board and give it to our lieutenant. So he went down to the old wreck for another piece of oak, but he had to dig down pretty deep this time before he got a piece. Like I just told you, everything above ground had been taken off.

You see it was a very small vessel to begin with—had to be to get through the entrance and inside the reef. Anyway I know Dahl had to dig down pretty deep, for he was down there a long time; and he commenced to change that very day.

About three o'clock that afternoon I started for a swim and met Dahl comin' up from the beach with a piece of board from the old wreck in his hand. His eyes were shinin' brighter than I'd ever seen 'em before, but I didn't see anything to think about in that; just took it that he was pleased because he'd got everybody doin' somethin' and satisfied again.

"Well, brother schemer," I says, "you shore hooked 'em for a while when you started that cribbage-board makin'."

"Yeh, shore," he says; and by the sound of his voice I'd bet ten dollars to a dime that he didn't know what I'd said. I have my doubts if he even knew who was talkin' to him.

Then I began to think. After all, was Midway goin' to get Dahl? I couldn't believe it. So I decided that he was occupied with figurin' on some stunt or other which he'd have all ready to start when the cribbage-board fever burned out.

I WENT on down and played around in the water for an hour or more and then went back to camp, but I didn't see Dahl again till supper-time. He was sittin' in his regular place at the table, but for all he knew of what was goin' on around him he'd might as well've been on the other side of the globe. I could see that by the look on his face; and several times when he was asked to pass somethin' somebody had to poke him in the ribs to make him notice.

It was plain to be seen that Dahl had somethin' besides the problems of the detachment on his mind. Figurin' out some stunt to keep the men contented wouldn't've used up his brain enough to make him forget where he was at. Anyway by the look of him I was certain that he'd slipped a cog somewhere.

But I couldn't imagine what had done it. Whatever it was I knew it had to be somethin' unusual—Dahl was the last man in camp I would've expected to get off his trolley. He liked Midway and the life there and everything. So it wasn't what you'd call environment that had got him.

And it wasn't because of trouble he'd had with any of us. Everybody in the detachment liked him, and up till that very day he'd been the push and go of the whole camp. It was like one of them mysteries in a book.

I didn't know what to think and I didn't like to go to Dahl and ask him what was the matter. He might've told me to go to hob; besides, that might've excited him and made him worse. I didn't know what to do—there was nothin' I could do—so I decided to wait and be ready for anything.

Next day Dahl sat in the shade of his tent all day and went through the motions of workin' on the new cribbage-board he was makin' for the lieutenant. But somethin' else had his mind I know, for I walked past him on purpose several times and every time he'd be starin' off across the water.

Well, in about a week the men all had their cribbage-boards finished. They'd scraped 'em with glass and sand-polished 'em and hand-polished 'em to perfection.

Then followed a few days of playin' cribbage—tryin' out the new boards. For a while you couldn't pass a tent but what you'd see a cribbage game goin'. But that didn't last long, and they soon began to idle round, restless-like.

But this time Dahl took no notice of 'em. He didn't do anything but sit in the shade of his tent and stare at the water and eat and sleep. The fact is, he ate very little and I doubt if he slept much at all about that time.

I found him several times after midnight walkin' on the beach near the old wreck. I was up myself because I was worried about Dahl. I'd come to the conclusion that there was no tellin' when he might break loose nor what he might do.

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Without you'd seen it you'd never believe a man could change so much as Dahl did in one week. I told you how he'd get all shiny-eyed when he'd see pink and blue coral or the moon on the water or somethin'.

But that was before he dug in the hull of the old wreck for a piece of board. After that he didn't pay any more attention to natural beauty than I did—not as much. Why, durin' the time I'm talkin' about now I've seen him turn his back on a sunset that would've made any artist in the world famous.

By that time the men were gettin' pretty restless, and there'd been two or three fist-fights in the last few days. Also the first sergeant had asked if Dahl and me couldn't start somethin' to keep 'em busy. He said he didn't like to put 'em to work because there was no work that needed to be done and they'd only get sore if they were set to work at somethin' that didn't need doin'.

So I looked Dahl up. It was afternoon and I found him sittin' in the shade at the back of his tent as usual and starin' at the water.

"Dahl," I says, "the detachment is beginnin' to wrangle some. The truth is, they're actin' a heap like a pack of dogs with only one bone among 'em. I thought maybe we'd better get together and see if we can't start somethin' to take up their time."

"Yeh, shore," he says and kept on starin' off across the water.

But he didn't say any more; and after waitin' a little while I tried again.

"Let's take a walk around the island," I said, "and see what we can figure out."

"It's too hot," he complained. "You sit down here in the shade."

By that time I hadn't the slightest doubt but what he was out of gear up above—for that matter, the whole camp knew it—so I humored him and sat down. Then for an hour I talked and tried to pull his mind back where it belonged. I was workin' then for Dahl—wasn't even thinkin' about the rest of the camp.

But it was no use. All I could get out of him was "yeh" and "shore." So I went back and told the first sergeant that Dahl was hopeless and asked him if he wouldn't help me to get somethin' goin'.

He helped me and we tried half a dozen different stunts, but they didn't work. The first sergeant was a good soldier but he was a cold, machine proposition and he couldn't pull and sway men like Dahl could. Neither could I. For that matter, it's a rare gift and them that has it are few.

Anyway the days dragged along and the men got more and more unruly: and about that time one of the sentries reported to the first sergeant that Dahl slept all night outside on the sand behind his tent. It was the limit. A crazy man, a machine-made first sergeant, a lieutenant who'd so far said nor done nothin' and eighteen men with muscles taut and arms drawn back, so to speak, all penned up on that little two-by-four sand-dune and ready to break loose any minute. There wasn't much I could do in face of such odds, and I had just one consolation left. In another month our relief was to come.

About the time things had reached this state the lieutenant showed signs of life for the first time. Late one afternoon several men at the lower end of the company street got into an argument and their language was somethin' awful. It was vile and abusive, and their swearin' would've made an old-time pirate sound like a missionary prayin'.

As I've told you already, that detachment was a bunch of whole-hearted good fellows. But men, no matter if they're good or bad, simply can't lie around idle with nothin' for their minds to fasten on to, and that's the fix these men were in on the day I'm talkin' about.

Well, the lieutenant's tent was at the upper end of the street and he heard their ravin'—couldn't help but hear 'em — and came out and called the first sergeant.

The first sergeant was in the lieutenant's tent till almost supper-time. Then he came out and hollered up and down the street for the detachment to fall in. And when we were lined up—all but Dahl—the first sergeant read us a routine schedule for daily drill which him and the lieutenant had mapped out.

This schedule provided for three hours' drill every day. There was to be boat-drill one day, foot-drill another, manual of arms another, and trench-diggin' practise another; and so on.

"What do you think of it, Holman?" the first sergeant asked me after the detachment had been dismissed. "Think it'll keep the devil worked out of 'em?"

"It shore will," I says; "but why didn't

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our little king do this before and save me several gray hairs?"

"Don't get sore, old-timer," grinned the first sergeant. "He's been there all the time; been standing back waitin' and ready. He wanted us non-coms to handle the situation if we could. He thought that'd be better than usin' disciplinary tactics, but he had his work all mapped out and ready to step in if it came to a show-down, and this afternoon he decided that the show-down had come."

NEXT mornin' at eight o'clock sharp when we formed for drill Dahl didn't come out at all. The lieutenant didn't say anything about it, but he went and had a talk with the doctor before he marched us off to dig trenches. It was Thursday, and accordin' to the schedule that was the day for trench-diggin' practise. All mornin' we wrestled with escarps, interior slopes, superior slopes, berms and such-like.

The sun was hot and sand makes heavy, tiresome shovelin'; but the lieutenant was there every minute and kept us at it till eleven o'clock. And the next day it was boat-drill till eleven o'clock; and every day —except Sunday of course—from then on it was somethin' till eleven o'clock.

Well, they swore and sweated and damned the lieutenant, but the business of keepin' 'em occupied was settled for good and we had no more trouble with the men. But I felt pretty bad about Dahl.

That first mornin' when he failed to fall in for drill the lieutenant asked the doctor to see if he could find out what was the trouble. Then after we'd left camp the doctor found Dahl and had a talk with him.

It was just like we'd all thought—Dahl was crazy. After that the doctor gave strict orders that Dahl was not to be bothered or excited in any way.

So he wasn't required to drill. He just wandered around harmless-like and done as he pleased. And most of the time he pleased to sit in the shade of his tent and stare off across the water. But no one had any idea what had made him crazy.

In this way the last month of our stay at Midway passed, and everybody packed their bags and ditty-boxes and began to look for the smoke of a ship comin' over the horizon. For a week we watched for the ship to come and bring our relief. Then one mornin' a cable man brought a message to the lieutenant.

In less than half an hour everybody in camp knew the contents of that message. It was from headquarters of the Marine Corps at Washington, D. C., and stated that owin' to unforeseen difficulty in arrangin' for transportation the detachment then servin' at Midway Island would be re-detailed for another six months' tour of duty there.

Well, you can imagine that detachment. Some swore and some sulked and some just crumpled up, all accordin' to their natures.

But it hit Dahl hardest of all. He didn't say anything; just sort of pulled away from everybody and began to get mean. Up to the time we got word to stay another six months he hadn't been mean at all, only preoccupied and silent.

But a few days after that cablegram came I was goin' for a swim and got right up close to Dahl without him seein' or hearin' me. He was sittin' in the shade of his tent and I wasn't tryin' to slip up on him—it just happened that way. But when he turned his head and saw me he jumped up like a flash, sort of crouched over and drew back one fist.

"—— you, Holman," he snarled, "what the —— you mean sneakin' up on me?"

"Gosh a'mighty, Dahl," I said, "I didn't see you shore. I was just goin' down to take a swim."

He sat down again and went on starin' at the water and didn't say nothin'; acted as if he'd already forgotten I was there. While I was standin' there lookin' down at Dahl and feelin' mighty bad, I noticed a little piece of oak board stickin' up out of the sand. That was the cribbage-board Dahl started to make for the lieutenant. He'd never finished it. I went on to the beach and had my swim, but I didn't enjoy it.

Next mornin' the sentries each reported to the first sergeant that Dahl had moved his sleepin'-place from the back of his tent to the beach. They said he took his blanket about eleven o'clock and went down and rolled himself up on the sand, close to the old wreck.

That made the first sergeant sort of uneasy, and he went and reported to the lieutenant that Dahl had took to sleepin' on the beach at night. The lieutenant shook his head sorrowful-like and said not to bother him as long as he didn't do any harm.

After that a couple of weeks passed and

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everybody got used to Dahl sleepin' on the beach. Then one night the camp was aroused by the crack of a rifle.

Now we had never before heard a shot in the middle of the night at Midway, and of course everybody tumbled out. And after searchin' around a bit we started for the beach, where we found Dahl sittin' up on his blanket with a rifle layin' across his knees and a sentry crouched down on the seaward side of the old wreck.

We learned afterward that the sentry had gone down to the beach to inspect the boat-moorin's—they had orders to do that once durin' each four-hour watch—and when he was alongside of the old wreck Dahl fired at him but missed.

As soon as the first sergeant saw what was up he ordered me and a half-dozen men to rush Dahl, take his rifle away and handcuff him. We done that and put him under guard for the rest of the night.

Next mornin' the lieutenant consulted the doctor again about Dahl and the medico said it was best to keep guns out of his reach and let him go loose. Said it might make him ravin' violent to keep him handcuffed or confined in any way.

So the lieutenant ordered that all the arms in camp be stacked in an extra tent and placed under guard; and after that was done he told the first sergeant to release Dahl.

All that day, after we'd taken the handcuffs off Dahl, he never said a word to any one, just walked around and glared like a caged lion. He didn't even set in the shade of his tent and stare at the water like he'd been in the habit of doin'.

I know just how he acted because I kept close watch on him. I expected he'd tear into somebody 'most any minute, and I wanted to be near him if trouble did come. I'd made up my mind that no one should hurt him any more'n need be, no matter what he done.

But along late in the afternoon there must've come a change in his thoughts. He looked different. I was still keepin' close to him and noticed it, but I can't quite tell you what it was like.

It was just an expression in his eyes, sort of sly or somethin'. Still I kept on watchin' him till a little after nine o'clock that night, when I saw him in the moonlight with his blanket under his arm, hikin' for the beach. Then I turned in.

DAHL was absent at breakfast next mornin' and an hour's scoutin' around the island failed to find him. Also both of our boats were ridin' at their anchors; we could see 'em from camp. Accordin' to that he'd not left the island. So we thought he must be at the cable-station.

The first sergeant and me went over there right away. Dahl wasn't at the cable-station—hadn't been seen around there for weeks.

Then somebody asked about the cable-boats and we all rushed down to their moorin's to see if they were there. One of 'em—a small cutter—was gone.

"So," I says to myself, "that'll account for the sly look in his eyes yesterday afternoon. He was figurin' then on takin' a cable-boat because he knew that wouldn't be missed till mornin' at best, which would give him a good start. On the other hand, one of our boats was shore to've been missed some time durin' the night."

Well, as soon as the first sergeant saw that Dahl had got away in a boat he rushed back to camp, grabbed a pair of binoculars and went up on "Lookout Hill," as we called it—that was the forty-five-foot sand-dune. It took him less than three minutes to pick up Dahl in the boat. He was headin' for the entrance in the reef and was about ten miles out—the entrance was fourteen miles from the island.

The lieutenant had already ordered me to make our cutter ready to sail. So we were standin' by and waitin' when the first sergeant came down and told us what direction Dahl was headin'. The lieutenant took charge of the boat himself and put me up in the bow to watch for coral bumps and warn him which way to steer to keep clear of 'em.

We were just lucky enough to have a fair wind on our stern, which drove us along at a good clip, and Dahl had about four miles to go before he'd reach the entrance in the reef. So it was a shore thing we'd overhaul him before he made it.

Well, it wasn't long before we had him in plain view and dead ahead. I could see him bendin' his back to the oars as if he thought he could get away from us.

I'm shore he'd seen us by that time. But he didn't try to race us long. In a few minutes he let go of both oars without even pullin' 'em inboard and they floated out on the water.

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Then Dahl stood up and began scoopin' somethin' from the bottom of the boat by the double handfuls and heavin' it overboard. At first I thought he was bailin' out water with his hands, but it was only a few minutes till we got close enough to see that it was somethin' hard, for it made a tiny splash every time he'd heave over a dump.

Then all of a sudden he stopped and looked at us like he was tryin' to decide what he'd do next. We were right close up by that time and in a couple of minutes more we would've been alongside of him. But Dahl had made his decision by that time; he threw up both hands and dived overboard, head first.

At that minute we swept alongside of his boat and the lieutenont ordered our sail hauled in; and bein' up in the bow like I was, it just came natural for me to go overboard after Dahl. It was a clear day and the water was fairly smooth.

I had Dahl spotted when I dived over. He was a little better'n a fathom down, I judged, and I dived straight for him, thinkin' I'd meet him as he came up, for I knew that he couldn't stay down much longer. But he saw me comin' and waited till I was almost to him. Then he dived straight toward me and down a little and, of course, I passed over him. Then we both popped up to the surface for air, and as soon as I got my breath I made a plunge for him with my right fist held back. I knew that I'd have to knock him out to do anything with him.

He saw me comin' again and, crazy or not, he understood what I was aimin' to do. He didn't dive away this time but waited till he saw me start my blow and when it was almost to him—you can't bring 'em over fast in the water, you know—he turned a bit sideways, just enough to make me miss.

Then he closed in and hooked one arm around my neck and so help me he started to take me down. Man, I turned cold. They talk about crazy people bein' strong—I know it.

All the same I managed to get my knees up against his chest and by pushin' back with my shoulders, I broke his hold. After that we popped up again for air.

This time I noticed that the boat had drifted off a bit—the one we'd come out in, not Dahl's boat. But the lieutenant had ordered the oars out and he was maneuverin' so as to come in reach of us.

There was a man in the bow with a boat-hook and I guessed that he had orders to rap Dahl over the head with it. Ordinarily I would've hated to see that done, but just then I was prayin' for it.

To tell you the truth, I was afraid of Dahl with that crazy-man strength of his. Besides, I'd seen sharks inside the reef near the entrance, and we were not very far from it then.

While I was thinkin' what I'd do next—and that wasn't more'n half a minute—Dahl must've heard the oars in the rowlocks or somethin', for he looked around; and I knew my chance had come. I made three quick, quiet strokes and came up close to him. Then he turned and I brought up a short one with all I had behind it.

It caught him square under the chin. He went limp and started sinkin' *pronto*. The lieutenant had got the bow of the boat right over us by that time and the man reached down with the boat-hook. I grabbed that with one hand and Dahl's shirt-collar with the other.

Then when they'd hauled us aboard the lieutenant shouted, "Out oars and give 'way" and steered our boat alongside the cutter Dahl'd been in. The man in the bow caught the cutter with his boat-hook and brought the two gunwales together. He took just one look into the other boat and I saw his under jaw drop.

"Sufferin' mackerel," he yelps, "there's a box of gold settin' on the bottom!"

IN THIRTY seconds I was standin' in the cutter. It was there—a small iron chest with the lid pried off. But it was not full. There was just five pieces of some foreign gold money in it. I picked the thing up and handed it across to the lieutenant and stepped back in our own boat.

Dahl was lyin' on the jib-sail up in the bow of the boat—still out, or maybe too exhausted to move. The lieutenant picked up a couple of them gold-pieces and looked at 'em.

"Spanish doubloons," he says; "but there's only five of 'em. That don't seem like enough for a man to go crazy over."

"No, it don't, sir," I answered; "but I'm thinking' that box was full, or pretty nearly so, when Dahl started with it. I believe it was them doubloons we saw him heavin' overboard. You mind the splash, sir, when

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they hit the water. I guess he had some twisted idea to put 'em where the rest of us couldn't get 'em and then drown himself."

"Well," said the lieutenant, "he succeeded in puttin' the gold where the rest of us can't get it—where nobody will ever get it. The water here around the entrance is known to be over a hundred fathoms deep. But where did he get the stuff in the first place?"

"Don't know, sir," I says, "but I've a notion I can show you where when we get back to the island."

Then we made the cutter fast to the stern of our boat, run up our mainsail and began tackin' for the island. I went up in the bow and sat down beside Dahl and lifted his head on to my lap.

His face was drawn and gray. I guess the strain had broke and left him all in.

He opened his eyes, looked up at me and smiled. It was the first time I'd seen him smile in many a day, and I can tell you it was good to see.

"I'm all in, Holman," he said, and closed his eyes again.

It wasn't much he'd said, but coupled with the tone of his voice and the look in his eyes it made me know that a sane man had spoken. Maybe it was the plunge in the water, or the knock-out, or gettin' rid of the gold that brought the change; I don't know. But Dahl was right again and that was enough for me.

By the time we brought up at the island Dahl was able to walk with a man on each side of him to lean on, and that way they took him to camp. Then when the lieutenant stepped ashore I pointed to the old wreck—it was a couple of hundred yards from the boat-moorin's—and we walked along the beach to it.

A little forward of where the mainmast would've been there was a fresh hole in the sand that filled the old hull. The hole was about four feet deep, big and round at the top and at the bottom—a square pit just the size of the iron chest.

"Do you suppose there's any more treasure in there, sergeant?" the lieutenant asked, and nodded at the old hull.

"Don't know, sir," says I; "but I'll be able to tell you soon, for I'm goin' to start diggin' right away."

"Yes," says the lieutenant; "and in less than fifteen minutes the whole camp would be fightin' each other for a chance to dig.

"No, sergeant," he goes on; "that won't do. This is a case where we must make use of authority and discipline.

"You go bring a detail of twelve men and six shovels and we'll have 'em work by relief—six at a time; there's not room for more—and I'll stay here till the job's done."

Well, I brought the detail and we worked. Lord, you should've seen the way we worked! In less 'an three hours we had that old hull as empty as on the day she was built. We literally pried it out of the sand, keel-beam and ribs.

But there was no more treasure; and we went back to camp, every one of us disappointed, I guess. For who'd not've had hopes after what Dahl had found?

Dahl slept from the time they took him to his tent—which was about ten o'clock that mornin'—till four o'clock in the afternoon. Then he woke up and sent for me—"to help him fill in the gap," he said, "and get things laid out clear in his mind."

"But, Dahl," I asked after I'd answered about a thousand questions, "can't you remember what you was doin' part of the time?"

"For the first three days, yes," he says; "but after that, very little. Just like you thought, I found the chest that day when I was diggin' for a piece of oak to make a cribbage-board for the lieutenant. I shoveled the sand away all around it and then got the shovel-blade in under the lid and pulled up. The hinges were rotten with rust and they snapped. Then I pried the thing open and saw them funny-lookin' gold-pieces.

"Don't know what I thought then. I don't believe I thought at all. I worked my fingers down among the gold-pieces and then a thought did strike me.

"What if there was some law or regulation or somethin' that'd make me give up all that gold because I was in the service and had found it on government property? I'd never heard of such a law, but the bare thought made me sick inside and weak all over.

"I looked up quick to see if anybody was around. I half-expected to see some one lookin' down at me and the gold, but nobody was in sight. So I jammed the rusty lid back on the chest, climbed out of the hole I'd dug and filled it up again.

"From that minute I began to figure how I could get that gold off the island without

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lettin' anybody know I had it. Well, for three days I drove my brain so hard for an idea that sometimes I thought it'd bust right through my forehead.

"But after them three days there's only a few things I can remember. I can remember shootin' at the sentry; and I didn't want to do it, but it just seemed like I had to. And throwin' the gold overboard, I can recall that; I felt like I was doin' somethin' smart—like I was outwittin' the rest of you."

"It's too bad," I broke in here, "that you threw your doubloons away right at the last minute."

"Too bad!" Then—

"Say, man," he finished, "I'm glad they're gone."

And he meant it.

SIDEWINDER

by Robert V. Carr

OFT I've heard your warning whir
Through the hot, still desert night;
Oft I've seen you, moving S,
In the moonshine clear and white.
Oft I've nearly trod on you,
In my awkward, purblind way;
Yet you spared me that I might
Live and laugh another day.

Snake, you own some virtues odd
Many men do not possess:
Never do you kill in hate,
Ne'er for wrongs seek you redress.
If you've time, you always sound
Warning bold and clear and fair;
Dry your zizzing notes proclaim:
"Death am I! Beware! Beware!"

Little brother of the sands,
With the red stitch down your back,
And your horns alert and quaint,
And your mystic threefold track,
When on some dark night I tread
Close to you, vague mound of gray,
Count me friend, and let me pass,
On my singing, careless way.

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LAW of FIRE

A Complete Novelette

by

HAROLD LAMB

Author of "Ameer of the Sea," "The Lion Cub," etc.

In the city of the silent lie those who are dead. Their blood is like to dried dust; over their faces the rose-bush blows.

Even thus do they lie.

Between the hills of the Mustagh Ata the camels pass—one by one like shadows passing into the night. The riders of the camels lift not their veils; they look not upon the right hand nor the left.

They stoop not to the rose-bush; nor do they eat when it is time. For they are the dead who have not died. . . .

Even thus do they ride.

IT WAS a fair day in the early Spring of the year of 1609 of the Christian era. And it was in the hills of northern Kashmir, on the outskirts of the empire of the Mogul, a day's fast ride from Srinagar, the City of the Sun.

Khlit had gone from his *yurt* to water his horse at the spring that lay in the valley through which ran the caravan-track from Leh.

The site of his *yurt* had been carefully selected, being half-way up the mountain-slope within the forest-line. It enabled him to see down the caravan-route and to observe who came and went from Srinagar to Leh.

And not to be seen himself—a matter of some moment for one who was outlawed by Jahangir, the Lord of Lords, and King of Kings, the Shadow of God on Earth, his Majesty, the Emperor of Hindustan.

The edict of Jahangir did not greatly trouble Khlit, who was accustomed to choose his own path in life and to ride alone. In this manner he had passed from the Cossack steppe to the Tatar steppe; from there to the mountains of Kashmir.

Yet a recent exchange of sword-strokes with sundry Persians and Pathans had made the name of Khlit notorious about Srinagar. Some called him the Wanderer, others the Curved Saber—in reference to the Cossack blade that was his favorite weapon.

Khlit's hair was gray and his tall figure spare with age. Of recent years he had trusted more to shrewdness than to the sword—which he still wielded, however, with a master hand—to preserve his life from the enemies who beset the hills and caravan-paths of Central Asia during the era of the Mogul.

In his felt *yurt* Khlit had had a companion other than his horse. It was the spirit of loneliness, bred of days of watching by the fire and nights of scanning the majestic slopes that thrust their splintered ice-crests into the moonlight.

Even as the spirit of the sword had risen beside Khlit when a boy and driven him to saddle and to the open steppe, the pang of loneliness irked him.

Not that Khlit was eager for the companionship of the Kashmiris of Srinagar. He had visited the court of Hindustan, and the ways of the Hindus were not his ways. He longed for sight of the men of the northern hills, who rode where they willed and slept under the stars.

It was a great hunger, this hunger that had come upon Khlit. It came of years of riding knee to knee and bridle to bridle with men of his own kind, who had no master, paid no tribute and owned no slaves. And it would not be denied.

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Perhaps the season had something to do with it. The snow by Khlit's *yurt* was melting and the freshets were breaking from the ice-barrier. The sun shone warmly into the entrance of the felt shelter and the mountain ash and poplar were breaking into leaf. It was the season when the Cossacks were wont to be afoot with their comrades.

Khlit had been meditating and had walked slowly down through the pines, drawing his horse after him. As he came out upon the spring he halted abruptly.

A group of men were squatted on carpets by the spring, watering a score of horses. Khlit stared at them thoughtfully. He had taken pains to observe—as was his custom—that no caravan was in view when he started down to the spring.

These men must have come down the valley swiftly if they had reached the watering-place before him. Moreover, it was not a caravan.

Khlit wondered if they were horse-thieves. But if the horses had been stolen they were going in the wrong direction for safety—being headed for Srinagar.

Only a half-dozen of the animals were laden, and these with light packs. He noticed that the horses were Arabs and Turkoman beasts, of excellent breed. Then his own horse neighed before he could prevent, and the group at the spring glanced up hastily, leaping to their feet and laying hand to weapon.

Whereupon Khlit walked forward, having no mind to turn his back on the watchers. They eyed him in silence as he reached the spring, which was already muddied by the hoofs of the other beasts. Seeing this, Khlit hauled at a bridle of one, making room for his own thirsty horse to drink.

"*Bismillah!* Dog and gully jackal! Would you take what belongs to others?"

The words were Turki, and sharply spoken. The speaker was a wiry Arab enveloped in a voluminous brown cloak, girded by a shawl in which were stuck an array of weapons ranging from silver-chased Turkish pistols to a pair of Damascus simitars—upon the jeweled hilt of one the Arab's lean hand trembled.

Khlit gnawed at his mustache calmly, making no move to withdraw his horse.

"Back, dog of a *caphar*. Wretched son of many fathers, and eater of filth—back!"

The man stepped closer, his dark face flushed with anger.

"Your horse had finished," remarked Khlit, speaking broken Turki. "And the clear spring was becoming muddied, even as this soil is defiled by your presence, O maker-of-lies."

With a grunt the Arab snatched at a pistol—only to have it struck from his grip by a swift slash of Khlit's sword. The master of the curved saber had learned by experience never to draw without striking, and always to be the first to strike. Moreover he had acquired a trick of thrusting with the same movement that drew his blade from scabbard.

The pistol had fallen into the pool, and the angered Moslem snatched at a sword. Khlit's blade flashed before his face and touched his turban, severing the folds over his forehead. The ends, dangling down, blinded the Arab, who stepped back.

"Peace!" said a harsh voice. "Peace, swallower of flames, and seeker after blood. Stay, Nasir Beg! The graybeard is your master."

Nasir Beg fumbled at his weapon uncertainly, his thin lips drawn back in a snarl. Khlit glanced at the speaker and saw a little man huddled in fur robes, over which two alert black eyes peered at him.

"Am I one, Pir Kasim, to suffer a blow like a dog?" muttered Nasir Beg.

"Peace!" cried the little man again impatiently, and Khlit sheathed his weapon, seeing that Pir Kasim was master of the Arab.

Nevertheless he did not cease to watch Nasir Beg, who was assuaging his injured feelings by muttered curses.

By his dirty turban, on which were strung valuable pearls, Khlit guessed Pir Kasim to be an Uzbek—probably a merchant and a man of some importance. The third of the group was a stout eunuch, richly garbed in silk. The two others who sat apart and watched were servants.

Khlit considered them without apparent interest yet with some curiosity. They were the first men he had spoken with in several moons. Moreover, Pir Kasim, who was undoubtedly a merchant, was traveling without goods; while the fat Ethiopian, who was a eunuch, had no women to guard.

In his days at the Mogul court Khlit had seen many strange assemblages, yet never before an Uzbek allied with an Arab and an Ethiopian.

Pir Kasim seemed to be owner of the

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horses; but these were not the kind ordinarily bought and sold in Kashmir, nor did the Uzbek appear to be a seller of horses.

Who were they; whither were they bound? And what manner of goods did Pir Kasim have for sale?

KHLIT'S horse had quenched its thirst by now, and he swung himself into the saddle Cossack-fashion without touching stirrup. Whereupon Pir Kasim combed at his thin beard and frowned.

Backing his horse slowly from the pool, Khlit eyed the merchant, and presently, as he had anticipated, the Uzbek lifted a crooked forefinger and spoke.

"A fair horse that, noble sir. You have him well to hand."

"Aye," grunted Khlit, "I have trained him. Ho, merchant, I would have a fellow to him. Sell me one of yonder beasts—I have gold mohars."

"Nay—" Pir Kasim did not shift his scrutiny—"I now have need of them. We be desert men, by the face of the Prophet, and when did such sell their horses for gold?"

He traced patterns in the dust beside the carpet as if meditating.

"Nay. What name bear you, and whence come you?"

"I have drawn my reins from the Mogul court," responded Khlit grimly. "As for a name—is there not writing on my sword? Aye, for him who can read."

Pir Kasim's shrewd eyes blinked. Wrapped in his robes, from which his yellow face and claw-like hand protruded, he resembled a hawk meditating upon its nest.

"Your sword, noble sir? You use it well, as Nasir Beg can bear witness. Whither ride you?"

"Where goes the wind from the hill gorge?"

"Out upon the plain. Harken, warrior—" Pir Kasim, being somewhat at loss as to Khlit's race and rank, was cautious—"the thought has come to me—nay, it is but an idle thought—you may desire to draw your reins to the border. Away, perchance—Allah is my witness that 'tis but an idle thought—from the tents and riders of the Mogul. Will you join us?"

Khlit considered, leaning on the peak of his saddle.

"Devil take it!" he growled. "Plain speech is best! You ride to Srinagar, not to the border-land."

Pir Kasim rubbed his lean hands together and stretched them out to the sun as if to a fire. He smiled craftily.

"Nay, we will turn back from the City of the Sun—in the space of fifteen days. Aye, when we have that for which we come we ride to the hills of the Mustagh Ata, past Ladak, to Yarkand which is in the northern plain. You will have a double handful of gold at Yarkand."

"A horse is more to my liking."

"Aye, a horse if you wish—the pick of the herd," assented Pir Kasim, adding hastily, "in place of the gold, noble sir."

"Does a fox run—blindly—with the wolf-pack?"

Khlit made as if to turn away, but the merchant scrambled to his feet and was at the wanderer's knee.

"Before Allah, good sir, my words are the very gems of truth. Nay—" he sighed—"I will grant you a copious handful of gold and a silver-chased saddle with the horse."

"When did a merchant of Samarkand give much for little? What seek you of me?"

Pir Kasim glanced at Khlit reflectively and hazarded well.

"Sword-strokes, noble sir. Verily, the path we tread from Srinagar to Yarkand will be one of peril. It may be our fate to be pursued—for we bear a rich burden. I have need of one who can wield well his sword."

He could not have framed a speech that fell in better with the wishes of Khlit. The wanderer sought the northern steppe and wished companions. Here both were offered him.

"A good horse," whispered Pir Kasim—"an Arab. And your share of the gold."

"Hey, I have a mind to ride with you. Yet it is not wise for me to go to Srinagar——"

"Excellent, noble sir," purred the Uzbek. "Have we not all some petty place where we ride not? 'Tis easily contrived; meet me at the caravansary of the river Sindh, an hour's ride west of Srinagar at dusk on the fifteenth day. On the following dawn we shall mount for Yarkand."

He smiled up at Khlit, caressing the silver ornaments of his bridle.

"Aye, noble warrior, that day we shall ride hard—and scatter the dust of our going upon these accursed hill-villages of the

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unbelievers, and upon our pack-animals we shall bear—spoil! Will you be one with us? The peril will be great——"

"It is well."

Khlit spurred away, up the pine slope.

"Fail not!" cried Pir Kasim anxiously. "The Sindh caravansary—on the fifteenth evening——"

The rider of the black horse did not look back, and Pir Kasim returned to the group by the spring, rubbing his hands with the air of one who has made a good bargain.

Nasir Beg swaggered in front of the merchant, scowling.

"Eh, one without wisdom!" the Arab sneered. "Will you number among us an unbeliever, a *caphar*——"

"Even so, wind-bag, and witless mouther of words! This unbeliever is Khlit, he of the curved saber."

Nasir Beg glanced after the Cossack, trying not to show his surprize.

"The Curved Saber knows the paths through the Mustagh Ata. Aye, the tribesmen know him. His name will be a shield over the dust of our going, Nasir Beg."

"Had I known it was he I would have struck more swiftly——"

Pir Kasim laughed at the moody Arab.

"Eh, you are a brave figure with your tongue, Nasir Beg. But with a sword it is otherwise."

With a grunt of anger Nasir Beg whipped out a dagger and clutched the shoulder of the merchant. Pir Kasim shivered.

"Nay, good Nasir Beg—it was but a test. Let not the cloud of vexation arise between us, good Nasir Beg. Verily, I would not mar with my breath the mirror of your bravery."

He pushed back the threatening dagger and freed himself from the other's hand.

"Likewise, Nasir Beg," he pointed out, "those who know our purpose will not join with us because of the shadow of peril. Khlit will serve us well——"

"Think you he will come to the caravansary?"

"I doubt it not."

Pir Kasim meditated swiftly, watching his comrade.

"If you would cast the cloak of blood upon the fire of your quarrel with Khlit, let the matter rest until we reach Yarkand. Then, if you choose, deal with him shrewdly, and—his horse; nay, his own horse and that which I shall give him—will be yours, with half of his portion of gold."

The Arab smiled grimly.

"So be it, Pir Kasim. Yet I will not share bread and salt with the unbeliever."

II

Like the kites that fly over a battle-field and the ravens that follow a caravan are the *hallal khors*. Yet the *hallal khors* are not birds but men.

IN THE round window overlooking the fountain of the seraglio knelt Yasmi Khanim. She lay curled upon the cushions on the tiled floor—a slim girl whose form bespoke youthfulness. Her attar-scented black hair fell about her slight shoulders. Her *kohl*-darkened eyebrows matched her eyes, which gleamed in the twilight like soft pansies.

"Eyes like a gazelle—hair blacker than the storm-wind—a mouth like the seal of Sulieman—teeth finer than matched pearls—her form like a willow, a slender willow."

So had said the Persian merchant who sold Yasmi Khanim to Raja Ram-Dar, adding—

"Aye, lord of exalted mercy, Yasmi Khanim, the Persian singing-girl, is a rose from the gardens of Ispahan, a diamond-sheen of the gems of Kuhistan!"

Well content was the raja with his new purchase, for the girl's face was fair as a Hindu woman of the higher caste, and her voice sweet. Yet only once did he hear her sing.

A great sickness had come upon the raja. Such a sickness as the fresh water and cold of Kashmir served to heal not. Nor did the sacred water of the Ganges—the river that flows from the feet of the gods—cure him, although brought by the Brahmans themselves.

On the night before, Raja Ram-Dar drank plentifully of the Ganges water and thereupon died.

Upon this matter and other things Yasmi meditated. From without the silent seraglio came the moaning cry of women's voices. This, Yasmi knew, was the cry of the mourners, of Darayshi Krisna and the other wives, of the slaves and the women who had been hired to wail.

For the funeral of the raja was to be that night. And fitting honor was to be paid the dead.

"Our lord has gone before us to the halls of the Bhanuloka! Ai! He has set the seal of Yama on his brow. Ai! Our lord has bent his royal head at the footstools of the gods!"

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The chant echoed ceaselessly. Yasmi wondered if the women were tearing their garments and letting their hair fall about their faces. So did the Moslem women of Persia.

But the Hindu women were strange. Yasmi wondered at the fierce exultation of the chant, which was led by the shrill voice of Darayshi Krisna, the favorite wife of the raja.

Yasmi herself was a Moslem, being from the hills of Kuhistan in northern Persia. She was a child of fifteen Summers, raised in a hill-village on the Afghan border—an onlooker at the mysteries of life, such as the splendor of a Hindu funeral.

From the burial place came the high plaint of music. Fiddles and guitars were sounding the *ragim bhairabi*, the music of the fire-spirits.

Yasmi stirred uneasily and snuggled down on her cushions. She had chanted the death-song at the grave of her father's father, who had been laid in the earth in a clean winding-sheet with his face toward Mecca, as was the law. But her song had not been like this.

Yasmi closed her eyes uncomfortably; then opened them alertly to watch a band of white-robed, shaven Brahmans pass through the courtyard toward the burial place. The Persian girl was oppressed by a vague foreboding, bred of the silence in the woman's court and the shrill music without.

She had heard of the burial of the sun-worshipers, who were infidels, such as the Hindus. The sun-worshipers had burned the bodies; perhaps these people did likewise.

Snuggling her feet into their slippers and drawing her velvet bodice closer about her waist—for the evening grew chill—Yasmi waited, looking very much like a brown fawn peering from its nest.

Hurried footsteps sounded in the corridors behind her, and she wriggled farther into the cushion, not wishing to be seen.

"Ho, base-born and shameless!"

The harsh voice of Sasethra, mistress of the slaves, assailed her.

"Wench without honor! Wouldst hide when the all-potent lord, thy master, is placed upon the *ghat*? Come!"

Sasethra clutched the girl's arm and jerked her to her feet, staring at her.

"How is this? Thine ornaments—necklaces—pearls! Where are they?"

The mistress of the slaves hurried Yasmi to her chamber and hastily arrayed her in bangles upon wrist and ankle, in silver-broidered cap that fitted over her splendid hair. She thrust jade earrings rudely into her ears, inspected her slim hands to see if they were henna-stained and coiled a pearl necklace over her throat and breast.

"Ignorant sparrow!" she scolded. "So thou wouldst hide? *Ai*—is this not the night of nights?"

"Verily," protested the girl, "I had a fear——"

"A fear?"

The woman screamed with sudden laughter.

"Nay, the Persian songstress trills of fear? Knowest not, wanton, there are those who will see that thou treadest the path of honor——"

She broke off at a new note in the chant without.

"Come! Already we are late."

Despite her words she fingered the bracelets covetously.

"Ho, these be rare stones——"

"My father's gift——"

"Speak not, shameless one, of thy father on this night when thy lord ascends to a thrice-purified life. Aye, the jade earrings will fetch a good price. And the pearls——"

Her eyes glinted evilly in the dim light, and she urged the child abruptly into a corridor leading to the garden. From there Sasethra sought a small gate which conducted them through the wall of the woman's courtyard out to the glen by the Sindh bank. Seeing many people, men among them, standing about, Yasmi would have drawn her veil over her face but the woman jerked it rudely back.

The river-bank and the glen were lined with watchers who faced a large pit. This pit had been nearly filled by a pile of brush and logs, neatly arranged.

By the light of the numerous torches Yasmi could see the body of the raja on the pile, resting on a couch covered with costly satins. At the head of the body a small hut had been built of brush.

And within the hut at the end of the couch sat Darayshi Krisna. The favorite wife of the dead man sat erect and silent, holding her lord's head on her knees.

Beside the *ghat* squatted musicians. And Brahmans came and went through the assembly, instructing the slaves how to pour

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oils and *ghee* upon the brush. Not far from the pit the women rocked, wailing.

Yasmi thought that it was to be a burial like that of the sun-worshipers. And even more ceremonious. Darayshi Krisna, she meditated, must have loved the dead raja with a great love since she waited until the last minute before tearing herself from her lord.

Beyond the pit and the watchers the broad current of the Sindh swept under the willows. A sharp wind from the mountain summits that Yasmi could vaguely see against the stars caused the torches to flicker.

She caught the scent of musk and ambergris. Truly this was to be a lordly burial!

But why Sasethra had dragged her there she did not know. For she could not sing the music that the fiddlers played.

"Honor to the son of Ayodyha and Ram! May he live again as a prince of princes, a king of kings. *Ai!* May he be purified by the sacred water and the thrice-sacred fire."

SO CHANTED the women, their voices rising over the sound of the instruments. Then the music changed. Tambourines and cymbals clashed harshly, drowning all other noises.

"The hour of thy lord is at hand, Persian," whispered Sasethra. "Behold, the high Brahmans have come from Srinagar, that all due honor shall be paid him by those who were the dust under his exalted feet."

Yasmi did not reply, for Darayshi Krisna had taken the torch that one of the priests handed her. The wife of Raja Ram-Dar thrust the torch into the brush of the wall of the hut at her side. At once the Brahmans scurried about the pyre, lighting the wood in a dozen places.

"*Aie,*" cried Yasmi, "she does not move. She will be harmed!"

An angry hiss from the mistress of the slaves silenced her. Then she saw in the light from the growing blaze Darayshi Krisna clad in all her ornaments, with unbound hair, remain tranquilly at the head of her lord.

"Twice, and the blessed five!"* cried a priest, raising his arms.

Others echoed the speech. But Darayshi Krisna did not see them. She was smiling, although the walls of the hut were crackling and blazing. She did not move when the perspiration poured from her set face and the fire caught her loose hair.

"Blessed is Darayshi Krisna!" cried the priest again in a loud voice.

Yasmi shivered and clasped her hands to her throat. She could no longer see the form of the woman who was burning herself on the pyre. The body of the raja was still visible, his sword on his hands.

By now the fire had filled the whole pit, soaring upward in swirling flames that illumined every person in the glen. The women had ceased their mourning and joined hands. They were running about the pit, crying out something that Yasmi did not hear.

Darayshi Krisna, she thought, wondering, had uttered no sound.

Several Brahmans stood as close to the flames as the heat would permit, leaning on long poles. Yasmi had begun to realize the significance of the poles, and she shuddered, whereupon Sasethra tightened her grip.

Just behind the priests were several men in armor, cloaked. Yasmi noted them only fleetingly, for Sasethra suddenly began to run toward the pit, drawing the girl after her.

Then Yasmi saw that the fire had caught the garment of one of the women—a slave, who straightway cast herself into the fire. A faint cry echoed above the roar of the flames—a cry that was drowned at once in the blast of noise from tambourines and cymbals.

"High honor shall be paid thy lord!" whispered Sasethra harshly. "The low-born slave felt the fierce kiss of the fire, and her spirit was weak—but the music overbore her plaint. Come!"

"*Aie!*" cried the girl in sudden terror. "Nay, Sasethra—I am one——"

"Thy lord is dead. Join thy spirit to his!"

Saying this, the mistress of the slaves stripped a costly bracelet from the arm of the trembling singer and thrust the bangle into her own girdle.

Terror-stricken, Yasmi saw one of the armed watchers seize and speak to a woman who danced about the fire. The slave tore herself from the man's grip and plunged into the pyre.

"Pity, Sasethra!" Yasmi implored. "Think, Sasethra—I am not a follower of the Hindu gods."

*Reincarnation. If she should die twice again in this manner—so the Hindu doctrine maintained—it would complete the five deaths which would win blessed immortality.

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"Thy place is with thy lord, shameless one."

The stout woman tugged at the girl, who recoiled weeping from the heat of the fire.

"Ho, servants of Ram-Dar," shrilled Sasethra, "cast me this faithless one after the others! Shall a slave outlive her lord?"

Several of the onlookers caught the girl, tearing the pearls from her throat and the jade from her ears. Yasmi whimpered, helpless in their grasp.

"The seal of death is set in her forehead!" screamed Sasethra, who had taken the pick of the girl's jewels. At the words a priest poured scented oil from a jar over her abundant hair.

"See, she feels the kiss of Yama!"

Then a hand gripped Yasmi, and a voice whispered to her in Turki.

"Life! Would you have life, little slave? Speak!"

The last of the dancing-women had vanished and already the fire had taken on a ruddier tinge, as the flames died. But Yasmi quivered with the heat that struck through her thin garments.

"Life—by Allah—grant me life!" she cried.

She felt the pole of the priest thrust at her back and heard the complacent tones of Sasethra:

"'Tis done. The holy Brahman has anointed her for death."

Then the pole was thrust aside and Yasmi was picked up bodily. The arms that gripped her were mail-clad. Two cloaked figures joined the man who held her as he turned back from the flames.

In sheer surprize the priests and the watchers gave back before the group of men who had seized the girl. Availing themselves of this, they moved hastily toward the edge of the glen.

"*Ai!*" shrilled the voice of Sasethra. "The *hallal kohrs!* Oh, the robbers of the *ghat!* Oh, the wretched scavengers of the dead!"

A command from one of the priests silenced the strident woman. Yasmi saw an emaciated form appear before them, a figure turbanless, with unkempt beard and hair, who lifted lean arms.

"Back!" commanded the form with calm authority. "No man may take her on whom is the seal of death and live."

One of the warriors with an oath struck down the *yogi* and a wail went up from the priests and the unarmed watchers. Some ran toward the group, but drew back at the flash of ready weapons.

Swiftly Yasmi was borne to where horses waited in the shadow of a grove, and the man who held her mounted and wheeled his horse away along a path through the trees, throwing her carelessly over the peak of his saddle.

"A rare jewel we have plucked this night, Pir Kasim," he said.

FOR some time the horsemen rode at a rapid pace, and Yasmi Khanim believed that they went in the direction of Srinagar. They slowed down among some huts, and at the bank of a canal she could see that the others of the party rode off, leaving her with the man who had first addressed her.

He sought for a space among the rushes of the canal and drew in a small skiff, which he bade her enter. He rowed out into the canal, and then more cautiously down the shadow of the bank under a bridge until he paused at what seemed a small gate in the steep slope of the bank.

Yasmi could make out the roofs and towers of the Srinagar streets rising against the stars. She lay quiet in the boat, watching the man.

He stepped ashore and bent over the wooden door. This was opened presently from within and a gleam of light showed.

"Haste!" grunted the warrior. "And step softly."

She passed through the narrow door, which smelled strongly of mud and foul weeds. A hand gripped her shoulder and pushed her, stumbling, up a flight of steps. The passageway led toward the light, and Yasmi passed through a poorly walled cellar into a room where the air was stale in spite of the heavy scent of sandal-paste.

Here the hand on her shoulder wheeled her around, and she faced a stout eunuch who eyed her with a grin.

"Here is a pretty pearl, Nasir Beg. Her mouth too wide, perhaps. Ho, a shapely parrot, taken from the grip of the hawks."

"A necklace-string stripped of jewels," grunted the Arab. "The accursed women took even her earrings."

Yasmi glanced at him gratefully and fell on her knees.

"May Allah reward you," she cried in Turki, as they had spoken. "May you find

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honor and live forever in the sun of prosperity. Happy am I to be among true believers."

She had spoken impulsively, but there was pride in her voice—and the tone of one more accustomed to command than to obey. The eunuch grinned the more while Nasir Beg scanned her in surprize.

"A Moslem wench, Mustafa," he observed. "Verily, she is not the less handsome for that. And I heard those who said at the fire that she is a singer with a voice like to the Persian nightingale. Your name?"

"Yasmi Khanim, warrior."

The girl flung back her dark hair, resentful at the Arab's tone.

"My father is Sheikh Ibrahim of Kuhistan, master of a hundred swords."

"The sheikh has a fair daughter," responded Mustafa.

"He has gold, and his hand is generous," said Yasmi in sudden misgiving. "He will reward well one who brings his daughter to the hills of Kuhistan."

The Arab yawned, and Mustafa shook his head.

"Kuhistan is many days' ride, little sparrow. Tune your voice to a sweeter note and Mustafa will find you a silken nest."

"Nay, I must ride to Kuhistan. A Persian merchant—may he be forever without honor—seized me at the border of my father's land."

"*Bismillah!*"

The eunuch spread out his plump hands.

"He had an eye to a comely face, Yasmi. Aye, it is fate. And who can outrun the shadow of fate?"

His expression hardened.

"Do not weary Nasir Beg with your whine but join the others."

He pointed to an alcove in the cellar. There Yasmi saw for the first time some four women seated on a ragged carpet. By their dress she knew them to be Hindus. All were young possibly, but haggard as if from sickness. They did not look at her.

"Nay—" Nasir Beg ceased yawning and stared at the girl speculatively—"I would hear her sing. If it is true that she is skilled it will increase her value. The wretched Faizul Anim owns—besides his wine-jars—a lute. She can come to the tavern safely."

"Have a care, Nasir Beg," warned the eunuch. "Pir Kasim would not thank you if you take the wench before the eyes of men. If our abiding-place be found——"

"There will be slit throats and molten silver poured into the eyes of the *hallal khors*, Mustafa!" amended Nasir Beg grimly. "Nay, cease your whine. Fain would I hear the voice of the song-bird. In the tavern of Faizul Anim none come but Moslems. Eh—is she not also a follower of the Prophet? Who will suspect?"

Yasmi's pale cheeks burned. She made as if to protest; then on second thought followed the Arab passively. Nasir Beg motioned her to a flight of steps leading upward from the cellar.

The steps terminated in what seemed a small and odorous chamber. It was, actually, a huge empty wine-vat. Nasir Beg kicked impatiently at the wooden side of the cask, and it opened.

Mustafa accompanied the twain, muttering angrily.

III

SINGING gently to himself, beating time complacently with a plump, bejeweled hand, Shir Mujir ibn Khojas of Bagdad, the *hafiz*—reciter of poems—wended his way importantly through the back alleys of Srinagar.

His gait resembled that of a crab, inasmuch as when a belated group of Kashmir nobles passed down the streets intersecting the alleys, accompanied by armed guards and link-bearers, the *hafiz* scuttled sidewise into the shadows; but when he encountered a cortège of slaves he lifted the skirts of his tunic and placed a scarf, musk-scented, before his broad nostrils, crying loudly:

"Passage—way for the deputy of the Lion of Persia! Back, scourings of the offal-pot! Scrapings of the mud! Infinitely foul! Ditch-born, gully jackals!"

Luckily for the fat Khojas, Turki was not readily understood by the Kashmir slaves. In this manner did Mujir ibn Khojas, who was slightly the better—or the worse—for numerous potations, thread his way from the bazaar quarter to the river-front at an hour so late that even the bazaar stalls of the Moslems, who were celebrating the feast of Bairam, were closed.

But the *hafiz* was in no mind for sleep since he had repeated lengthy versions of the Shah Namah at the board of wealthy merchants and was consequently the richer

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for silver and gold coins, both dinars and shekels.

"Nay, the night air is soft—soft as maidens' tresses; and fragrant—fragrant as the essence of roses on the brow of a sultan's favorite," he muttered uncertainly, lurching over a heap of refuse which was far from sweet; "and I, the golden-tongued Mujir, peer of reciters, bedfellow, nay, boon-fellow, of princes; I, the diamond in the tiara of Allah, the flower i' the mantle of the Shah—may he bellow, or is't *mellow*, i' his grave? I, the *hafiz* of the chosen of Allah, the Commander of the Faithful, the Caliph who is the very substance of blessedness, the essence of divine light, and the spotless robe of honor—I'm am also a gleam of radiance and a pearl of precious substance. Where lies that accursed hovel of Faizuli Anim?"

Pursuing the uneven tenor of his way, the *hafiz* halted to beat at a closed door only to be confronted by the emaciated figure of a Kashmiri child.

"Verily," he cried, "by the beard of the Prophet! Faizuli Anim has shrunken most strangely in form, for he was once handsomely fat, even as I—although not quite so handsome or so fat. Ho—oho, Faizuli Anim! Nay, what is't?"

The boy had been snatched back and a hag, on whose wrists clinked the chains of bondage, faced him. In a trembling hand she held a knife and cursed fearfully from a mouth that was toothless and sore-ridden from disease.

"Nay," meditated the worthy *hafiz*, "now is Faizuli Anim in the shape of a vixen, a toothless vixen. Here is the work of evil magic and no place for the high-born Mujir. Farewell, shade of Faizuli. Farewell, hag, whose tooth hangs from her hand like the fang of a wolf——"

He aimed an unsteady kick at the twain and passed on until he reached the carpet-hung entrance of the Moslem tavern which overhung the river-bank.

The light from a solitary candle showed him Faizuli Anim seated on a carpet within. Mujir jerked off his leather shoes and replaced them, not without difficulty, with a pair of slippers.

"By the mole on the face of Mohammed," chanted the *hafiz*, "I have found you at last, worthy Faizuli Anim—after a struggle with an evil angel who was all but toothless, and that one tooth a thing of ill omen! Ho, good keeper of the blessed wines—a goblet of snow-chilled Shiraz!

"Verily I have a thirst that is a mighty thirst, wherein all the sands of Khorassan do itch in my throat. Aye, how runs the verse—

"Leave't to others to cant and to repine
When you and I embrace our life—the vine."

"Nay, methinks the verse is mine. 'Tis excellently attuned. Ho—I will sit in the inner chamber——"

Despite the tavernkeeper's remonstrance Mujir stepped gracefully over the prone forms of slumbering camelmen in the outer stall and pushed through the curtains that veiled a separate compartment of the inn. Here he salaamed before a seated figure and slumped down heavily on the carpet. The other glanced at him once sharply, then looked away indifferently. Not so Mujir.

"Come, brother in wine and watcher of the night, let us tickle our throats with that which Mohammed scorns but I do not."

The seated figure made no response. Struck by a new fancy, the *hafiz* unrolled his prayer-carpet from his waist and hung it with drunken seriousness over the opening in the curtain—after Faizuli Anim had brought him his jar of wine and left.

"Thus," he explained, stroking his dyed beard, "do I veil the aspect of our delightful sin as a radiant damsel shrouds the beauty of her face. Come, brother! My eyes tell me you are a soldier, and your rich armor and jeweled ornaments bespeak rank and prowess.

"When did the wild ass keep his muzzle from the fresh grass, or a warrior his lips from wine—or the wine of a woman's mouth for that matter?"

The stranger made no response. He was a straight-backed man, wearing travel-stained mail, nearly concealed by a cloak of rich texture. His cotton trousers were clean and his red morocco shoes costly. The hilt of his simitar was a mass of jewels, and a blue diamond shone from his turban crest.

These things the *hafiz* had noticed. But he had not observed the dark face under the turban with the scar on one cheek from chin to brow, the thin, hooked nose, and the hard eyes which moved slowly from object to object with a purposeful stare.

By face and form the stranger was an Afghan of a northern tribe; by dress a

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follower of the Mogul, and one of rank, who had prospered in war.

But the *hafiz* was in a mellow mood.

"Nay, have I not earned a kiss from the grape, O warrior?" he appealed. "'Twas a rare feat to thread the streets of the City of the Sun this night.

"Patrols of cursed unbelievers, godless Hindus and their like, search the bazaars and alleys for certain evil-doers. 'Tis said in the bazaars that a woman of the dead raja was snatched from the *ghat*, and the evil Brahmans are astir like a nest of angered bees."

This time the soldier looked up.

"Eh—why do they search in Srinagar?"

"Because—so 'tis said—the woman was carried hither. Nay, I would she had been burned to a crisp on the *ghat* for the trouble she has made me. When the shaven priests have anointed a woman for death what else is she fitted for? Ho—the wine is cool!"

Whereupon he quaffed deep and lay back upon the carpet with a watery sigh, his plump limbs lax, and the Afghan regarded him with disfavor.

"Would they had burned—shriven—shriveled her, for by Allah she was a dainty morsel; verily the fire would wrap her limbs, licking them with ardent tongues, and she would have cried out."

So mumbled the *hafiz*, and the warrior's eyes narrowed while he bit at his beard.

"Methinks, aye, verily I think—sweet thought, choice as a pearl in a goblet of wine, red as blood—she would be reshriven, nay reshaped, into a houri fair as a blown rose, for she was Moslem. *Aigh*——"

Mujir groaned from the capacious depths of his stomach and would have sat up, but his palsied muscles refused their office. The flat of the warrior's scabbard had descended with no little force on the highest point of the wine-bibber's outstretched form—which was also his tenderest point.

"Toad, evil mouther, and worm!"

The Afghan spoke with slow decision.

"Stand!"

"Nay—*akh*, by Allah! I am death-smitten——"

"Verily, such will be your fate if you obey not. Stand!"

There was the sharp ring of anger in the soldier's abrupt command, and Mujir, who had scanned him with a rolling eye, clambered to his feet wide-eyed, holding his round belly tenderly in both hands.

"Now what mean you, warrior?" he panted. "Nay, are we not both servants of the pr——"

"My rank is *mansabdar* of Jahangir the Mogul. My title from the lips of such as you is lord."

"Nay, you are graceless——"

Mujir's words ended in a squeal, for the Afghan's sword flashed in his face. Twice the weapon struck as the soldier gained his feet and the right and left edges of the *hafiz*' cherished red-dyed beard fell to the floor. He stared at the wisps of hair blindly; then abruptly his stout knees began to shake.

"Harken, reader of poems and guzzler of forbidden wine."

The Afghan scowled at him and spat in disgust.

"Shall one without honor claim mercy? Shall swine taken in sin be treated as men? Put down your prayer rug on the floor."

In silence Mujir did so. In a moment he had become half-sober.

"It is near the hour of dawn, Mujir. Can your evil lips frame a prayer?"

"Aye—lord. O excellent guardian of the faith——"

"Speak not of faith. Is there faith in a body such as yours? I think not. Pray!"

The *hafiz* choked, but could not take his blinking eyes from the harsh face of the *mansabdar*.

"Lord, and fountain of all the virtues, shield of the faithful, favored of Mohammed. Harken to your slave. 'Tis in truth the feast of Bairam. And I——"

"Perform your ablutions."

With that the soldier snatched up the heavy wine-goblet and placed it gently at his feet.

"By your favor, Abdul Dost," came the servile voice of Faizuli Anim from the door. "Here is one Nasir Beg with the slave Yasmi who would hear the music of her golden throat. Knowing that Mujir ibn Khojas was skilled in such things, I ventured to bring the twain here that the *hafiz* might render judgment on the voice of the maiden——"

"The *hafiz*," growled Abdul Dost, "is at his ablutions."

Behind the stout form of the tavern-keeper he caught sight of a slender woman, held firmly by a lean Arab. Mujir also had seen the newcomers, and his jaw dropped.

Abdul Dost considered; then seated himself on his heels, nodding to Faizuli Anim.

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"Let the girl enter," he commanded. "And the *hafiz* render judgment."

YASMI stepped within the curtain wearily, a lute in her hand. Nasir Beg squatted down at her side, eying the kneeling teller of poems with some curiosity. At Abdul Dost also the Arab glanced—twice, then turned moodily upon the girl.

The tavernkeeper had left them. But a moment later the curtains parted slightly and a black, round face peered through the aperture.

Mustafa was keeping watch over his charge.

"Sing!" growled Nasir Beg. "Must I lose sleep because of such as you? Yet it was the command of him who owns you that trial be made of your voice. Haste, for I am weary."

By the faint light of the bronze lantern overhead Yasmi scanned the two beside her. She looked indifferently at Mujir over her veil, and long at Abdul Dost. She was worn with the hardships of the night, and tears trembled in her dark eyes. But Nasir Beg was impatient.

She bent her head over the lute, striking the strings feebly. Her slender shoulders shook with a brief sob.

"Haste, wanton," growled the Arab. "Must I summon Mustafa with his lash?"

He clutched at her shoulder, but the girl drew away swiftly. She lifted her head in sudden decision and to Nasir Beg's surprize let fall her veil.

Mujir sucked in his breath with admiration at sight of the delicate face framed in dark hair and glanced apprehensively at Abdul Dost, who was watching the girl closely.

A quick flush came into the cheeks of Yasmi, and she looked up at the lamp, a half-smile at the edge of her lips.

Then she sang, striking the lute softly, the song of the hill-tribes of Khorassan, the song that begins:

> Where is the falcon's nest?
> And the nest of his mate—where
> Save in the wind! And the wind is the breath of the hill.

Mujir hardly listened. He marked the trembling of the girl's lips, the rise and fall of her breast under the veil and her slight hands upon the cords of the instrument. And he sighed noisily.

Nasir Beg lent an attentive ear, for he had the Arab's natural love of melody. Yet the song was not to his liking, and—seeing the goblet—he drank.

Behind the curtain Faizuli Anim crept to Mustafa's side to hear the better. Only Abdul Dost seemed not to listen.

But the Afghan was strongly moved by the song. He had heard it formerly in the tents of the hillmen of Khorassan, in the camps of the riders of Badakshan. It brought before his memory the time, long past, when he had tended horses for the lords of Afghanistan, now dead or servants of the Mogul.

Yet, being what he was, Abdul Dost allowed nothing of this to show in his scarred face. Indeed he resolutely put from him the impulse of memory that had been born of the girl's song.

Yasmi did not reach the end of the song. Her voice quivered and she dropped the lute, throwing herself on the carpet before Abdul Dost.

"Pity, lord; have pity!" she cried quickly. "By your dress you are of the Afghan hills. Verily the heavy hand of wrong-doing has taken me from the tent——"

"Peace, wench!"

Nasir Beg struck her savagely across the shoulders.

"Would you turn from those to whom you owe life?"

"Aye."

The girl faced him resolutely.

"For I am free born."

"No longer such," responded the Arab grimly, his hand on her arm. "Have you not sold your body to us?"

Yasmi cast the lute from her.

"I knew not what I did," she pleaded. "I thought you were—friends."

She touched the foot of Abdul Dost.

"Lord, will you believe? By Allah and the face of the Prophet, this is naught but the truth. I am no slave, yet would this man and his kind hold me——"

"Faithless, and teller of lies!" snarled the Arab. "Come, *hafiz*, the song is ended. Speak—is her voice worth silver, gold, much?"

Mujir glanced apprehensively at Abdul Dost, who seemed lost in thought. Then he waved his plump hand doubtfully.

"'Tis true I am a rare judge of such matters, excellent sir. The sound of the woman's song is like the nightingale.

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"Yet it would be well to teach her what best pleases her masters. Now if it is your will to sell her in the Bagdad market she should trill naught save the soft and amorous Persian airs——"

"Nay," grunted Nasir Beg; "she is to be sold to the wealthy mandarins of China, the men of Han, at the Yarkand mart. They pay well——"

"*Ai!*" moaned Yasmi. "Shall a Moslem be sent to the worshipers of the lotus-eyed god?"

She had appealed to Abdul Dost. The Afghan bent forward, searching her face earnestly, then looked long at Nasir Beg.

"She is yours?" he questioned sharply.

"My master's. We have risked our throats that she should live. She has given her body to us. *Bismillah!* We will not yield her up."

Nasir Beg spoke decisively. Abdul Dost frowned. If the girl was truly the property of the Arab it would be a delicate if not hazardous matter to interfere on her behalf. Moreover Abdul Dost had no use for a slave, even such a one as Yasmi.

He had marked the movement of the curtains and suspected that Nasir Beg was not alone in his guardianship of the singer. Still—the song had touched his memory.

"Did she yield herself as a slave, Arab?"

"As a slave."

"A lie!" exclaimed Yasmi defiantly.

Abdul Dost considered, then spoke coldly to Nasir Beg.

"What price will she bring in the Yarkand slave-bazaar?"

Nasir Beg calculated shrewdly.

"Eh, she has a face like a rose, and her form is rounded. Eh, you who have heard know that she graces the necklace of beauty with the pearl of song. Mujir ibn Khojas, who is a judge, has said that her voice is like to a nightingale. At Yarkand she will fetch twelve—nay fourteen—gold mohars."

Yasmi sighed and drew her veil about her face. Her glance was still fixed hungrily on Abdul Dost.

"That is her price?" inquired that warrior.

"Aye."

Abdul Dost put his hand to his girdle.

"I have a whim, Arab."

He opened his hand over the carpet. Gold coins tumbled to the floor and rolled about.

"There be mohars—gold. Count seventeen, and take them.

"The girl's song pleased me, and—she is a free-born Moslem. Shall a falcon of the hills die in a foul cage?"

Wild hope leaped into the eyes of the singer. Mujir stared, licking his lips. Verily, he thought, this was a great lord who could shower gold like copper coins and let another count the tally.

But Nasir Beg drew back with a smile. He bowed and stroked his beard craftily.

"Seventeen? Nay, the generosity of the lord is like to the light of the sun. Yet—" he smiled again—"at Yarkand gold is worth more than here. At the market of the Han slave-merchants Yasmi would fetch twenty such coins."

"Count then the twenty, and begone."

Abdul Dost snarled, and the mask of indifference fell from his face.

Nasir Beg still smiled. Without consulting Pir Kasim he did not dare sell the girl. Besides, if she were sold to Abdul Dost it would be known. She would be recognized as the singer who had been stolen from the raja's *ghat*, and search would be made for those who had taken her from the priests.

The Arab was no coward, yet he knew how closely the Hindus had ransacked the byways of Srinagar for his party, and he suspected that the *yogi* he had struck down in their flight had been badly injured.

The fate of the *hallal khors* if discovered was a thing not to be lightly contemplated. And if in addition they had slain a priest death by torture would be the least thing in store for them.

"Nay," he announced. "My master will not sell Yasmi."

Abdul Dost rose to his feet, hand idly at his belt. Yasmi followed his every movement with anxious eyes, scarcely breathing while she harkened to the argument between the two.

"Arab," said the Afghan slowly, "here is the price you named—and more. Take it—or be false to your word."

"Nay."

Nasir Beg still smiled.

"The thought came to me that you jested, so I also made a jest."

"I do not jest. Twenty-two gold mohars lie on the carpet. Take them!"

The Arab rose lithely drawing slightly back and glancing at the curtain. But then the voluble *hafiz* gave tongue.

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"O lord and ocean of the nectar of kindness, and mountain of holy righteousness, I, the teller of poems, the faithful Mujir, will tear the veil of blindness from your exalted eyes. O leader of the faithful—" the *hafiz* saw in a flash, or thought that he did, a chance to redeem himself with Abdul Dost—"talk not of paying such a sum for this worthless one. O noble warrior, she is worth not one silver dinar."

He paused, pleased at the attention he was receiving—though Abdul Dost was watching the Arab more closely than the speaker. Yasmi tried to take the soldier's hand.

"With my eyes I saw it, lord," resumed Mujir. "This very night. By chance, it was verily by mere chance, I came upon the *ghat*. Nay, I knew naught of what was to come to pass, but some worthless beggar had whispered that women were to be burned—not that I believed, lord.

"Nay, by chance I watched—that is, I could not help but see—this very woman led to the *ghat* and anointed by the priest for death. And then snatched by force——"

For the first time Abdul Dost glanced down at the *hafiz* angrily. As he did so Nasir Beg smote the lamp with the flat of his sword. The chamber was in darkness.

A cry from Yasmi—hurried footsteps. An oath from Abdul Dost, who had groped for the girl and finding her not, had sprung for the curtains, drawing sword as he went. His foot struck against something that quivered, jelly-like, and he rolled to the floor over the prostrate form of Mujir.

He was up immediately. But the curtains were cast loosely over his head. He felt the impact of a dagger against his mail shirt and jerked free of the entangling cloth. Then he halted perforce to listen for footsteps, as the tavern was in darkness.

No sound rewarded his seeking. Only the pale light of the new day outlined a window faintly.

"Lord," muttered a suppliant voice, "have I not saved your——"

Abdul Dost was lean, but there was great strength in his arms—the deceptive strength that had made him one of the finest swordsmen of northern Hindustan.

He caught the *hafiz* by girdle and collar and dragged him to the tavern door. Outside the dawn marked the river-bank, high above the water at this point.

"Harken, *hafiz*," said Abdul Dost. "I swear an oath on the faith of my fathers that I shall seek the girl Yasmi until she is free or Nasir Beg is dead.

"It is time," added Abdul Dost grimly, "that you performed your ablutions."

Whereupon he raised the struggling man to his shoulder and flung him outward, watching with satisfaction the resulting splash. He was content when the fat bulk of the *hafiz* failed to climb from the current.

Running footsteps sounded and two armed men hastened up.

"Sluggards!" snarled the *mansabdar*. "Ahmed—Rasoumi! Heard you not the struggle?"

"Lord," panted one, "we slept, being weary. Has hurt come to the favored of Allah?"

"Nay. Search me the tavern. Come."

But their efforts ended in the cellar filled with giant wine-casks. None were visible save the snoring and drunken camelmen.

Abdul Dost passed through the empty rooms, noting grimly by light of the torches his men had kindled that the gold coins were gone from the carpet. Either Mujir or Faizuli Anim had made good use of his time.

But he did unearth the cowering tavern-keeper in the rear of a wine-vat.

"Speak the truth, or follow Mujir into the river!" he informed the man. "Who is that Arab Nasir Beg? Who was his master? Whither went they?"

By degrees Faizuli revealed the secret of the passage behind the wine-cask. But when the Afghan entered it cautiously the lower cellars were bare and the door to the river-bank open. No boat was to be seen.

"Lord, and mountain of mercy," wailed the tavernkeeper, "I know naught of them save that they planned to depart eastward and north along the Sindh caravan-route, and they are many. They ride to the Darband Pass in the Ladak border."

"Thither we also will ride," said Abdul Dost.

So it happened that the *mansabdar* and his two men without waiting for further preparation set out along the Sindh trail in the early morning of the day after the feast of Bairam.

And when they had departed a woful figure, mud-coated and gasping, dragged itself from the reeds by the river and lay cursing the day that Abdul Dost was born of his mother, the day that he had come

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to Srinagar, and his father and his father's father, even to all his forebears.

IV

The lightning strikes down a tall tree; but it does not linger to be seen. Not otherwise strikes the sword of a skilled warrior.—*Kashmiri Proverb.*

KHLIT was glad to be in the saddle again. He was well content to turn his back upon the City of the Sun and journey into the mountain passes. And the rapid pace that the caravan struck satisfied him.

In truth he saw no need for haste. Yet Pir Kasim, who led the cavalcade, pressed the horses to their limit.

No stop was made during the day. Only after dusk did the caravan halt, in a valley near the highway where water was to be had. And Khlit, who was well versed in such matters, noted that the merchant posted sentries. Also that the fires were put out after the dinner had been cooked.

He saw too that they avoided the villages. Once when they passed through the outskirts of a collection of huts ragged Kashmiris ran forth and stoned them. A sally by Nasir Beg and two of his men drove back the villagers, but not before blood had been shed.

Another thing struck Khlit. It was when they met a group of three Hindu riders going in the opposite direction. The men drew back from the trail, scanning the caravan and scowling. Weapons were drawn and Nasir Beg summoned Khlit to his side to wait with their attendants until the horses of Pir Kasim had all passed the spot.

Then they rode after the caravan. But Khlit, looking back, saw the three sitting in their saddles and watching. As long as the caravan was in view the riders watched.

Directly afterward Pir Kasim turned aside from the main highway and led his troop through an unfrequented pass, where the cold—even in early Summer—was great, and the women suffered.

Khlit had noticed with some surprize that the merchandise of Pir Kasim was—women. He had met the caravan on his way to the rendezvous at the Sindh road. And the women had been with it then. They rode heavily veiled and closely watched by Mustafa.

For some time Khlit paid no heed to the women. He supposed—since neither Pir Kasim nor Nasir Beg spoke of the matter—that they were slaves.

He did not at first connect the anger displayed against the caravan in the villages with the women. For Khlit cared little for the female sex, slaves or otherwise. He was only annoyed that they were with the caravan, since he knew the cold of the higher passes in the Himalayas would cause them to complain.

Khlit did not even try to understand what was to be done with the women at Yarkand. Presuming them slaves, he thought vaguely that they would be sold and dismissed the matter from his mind.

Not so an event of the first night after they left the main caravan-track. This was two days' fast ride up from Srinagar, due east along the bank of the Sindh, at the Zodjila Pass.

Pir Kasim's change of course had brought them into waste rock-ravines through which the tired beasts wound slowly. Twilight found them without food other than some oaten cakes.

Khlit had his own stock of provisions in his saddle-bag—dried horseflesh and milk-curds—for he disliked to eat with Mustafa, who shared the merchant's board.

They had come upon two donkeymen who had pitched their *yurt* in a hollow and were stretched beside the fire on their sheepskin cloaks. Besides the donkeys the men had several sheep of the thick-haired Kashmir species.

Pir Kasim halted the cavalcade and descended with Nasir Beg to bargain with the peasants for mutton. Khlit had dismounted to look to the leather shoes of his black pony—he had become attached to the strong horse during their Winter companionship, and the rocky going had caused the beast to limp.

So he did not see the merchants barter. He looked down however at sound of raised voices. Nasir Beg had flown into a rage, while the Kashmiris were protesting.

"Eh, will you not give food to women who hunger?" snarled the Arab.

"Aye, lord," remonstrated a ragged *bhikra*—beggar. "Yet that *our* women should have meat, and so yield milk to their babies, we must have a price for the two sheep you ask——"

"Wretch!"

Nasir Beg spurred upon the two donkeymen. Khlit saw that the Kashmiris had

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made no move to draw weapons, yet the Arab struck one down with his simitar. It was a shrewd blow at the base of the throat, and the man lay dying where he had fallen.

The other turned and ran up the gorge. Pir Kasim dismounted and drew a Turkish pistol from his girdle. This he leveled across the saddle of his pony. Khlit heard the roar of the report and saw the Kashmiri stagger and fall to his knees.

Then Nasir Beg trotted up to the wounded man and returned presently, to wipe his blooded blade upon the garments of the first Kashmiri.

"Eh," he called to Khlit, "we shall eat well tonight, and the donkeys will serve us well in the hill paths where the horses are apt to fall."

Khlit turned back to his own horse in silence. He had been surprized at the uncalled-for slaying. Perhaps—although he had heard it not—the Kashmiris had given cause.

Still, why should Pir Kasim have shot down the wretched beggar who was fleeing? He could not have harmed them overnight.

Pir Kasim however set two men to cover the bodies with stones.

"By the tracks of blood is the path of the wolf known," he grinned at Khlit. "And we must leave no trace."

The Cossack did not share the mutton.

That night they felt the full force of the wind down the gorge. As usual there was no fire. Khlit did not mind it, for he was accustomed to cold and his *khalat* was well lined.

The three caravaneers managed to sleep among the packs of stores. Pir Kasim had his *yurt* of hides, which he shared with Mustafa.

But Nasir Beg roused Khlit from a light sleep, and his dark face was blue with chilled blood, in the light of a small torch he had kindled on returning from his watch.

"Be not angered, Khlit," the Arab said, civilly for him. "My eyes are heavy with sleep, for it is the third watch, and the blood in my limbs is turned to ice. The caravan rascals are too wearied to be trusted. Will you keep watch until dawn?"

Khlit yawned and cursed forcibly.

"Are we hunted antelope, Nasir Beg, that we should stand guard in the darkness? What fear you?"

Nasir Beg was urgent, and took pains to be plausible.

"There be robber folk in the passes, Khlit. Lawless Kirghiz, and without doubt outcast Kashmiris. Pir Kasim, who is wary as a steppe fox, believes they have scented the caravan. 'Tis but three hours to dawn."

Khlit rose silently, taking his *khalat* with him and stamping warmth into his feet. He drew on his boots, tightened his belt and strode off to the point where Nasir Beg had stood.

"By Allah, Pir Kasim will thank you," the Arab called after him softly. "Beyond the rock on the farther side is a nook where you can see up and down the pass and be sheltered from this accursed wind."

Khlit grunted and wrapped his sheepskin robe over his high shoulders. He did not intend that Nasir Beg should occupy the warm nest where he had been sleeping. Beyond the line of tethered horses he halted to see where the Arab would seek refuge.

He had not long to wait. As soon as his tall frame had passed beyond the torchlight Nasir Beg threw the burning brand to the ground. By its failing light the Cossack saw Nasir Beg slip off his outer cloak and the long white robe that he wore and pass swiftly into one of the *yurts* occupied by the women.

There were six women, and they slept—or tried to—two in each shelter. The one the Arab had chosen had been pitched by Mustafa for the youngest of the women—one wearing Persian dress as Khlit had noted—and a slender Hindustani whose ankles and wrists were heavy with bracelets.

As Khlit turned away to his lookout he fancied he heard a cry from the *yurt*. He reflected grimly that the post Nasir Beg had mentioned was behind the rocks and out of sight of the camp.

Here he sat and watched the sky change in the east from crimson to saffron and gold. He saw the giant peaks overhead take shape against the dawn, first black, then silver and finally white.

High overhead an eagle rose from a nest of pines and circled against the blue of the sky. He heard the horses stumble to their feet. Even before the sun's rays struck down the pass he heard the caravaneers grumble as they kindled the fire, and caught the pungent scent of green wood.

From the camp his glance wandered to the rock-piles that marked the graves of the Kashmiris, and to the donkeys, standing passively in their tethers awaiting their

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morning meal of dried grass, indifferent as to who their master might be. And he scowled moodily.

He was no longer content with his surroundings. Well as he liked to be in the highlands of the Himalayas he had begun to meditate upon the character of his companions and the nature of the caravan.

When Pir Kasim called him to the simmering pot of mutton Khlit replied gruffly and ate where he sat of his own dried meat.

THAT day the march was harder than before. Pir Kasim had ordered the packs to be placed on the donkeys; this gave them extra mounts, but they made slow progress along the winding trail that threaded the surface of the cliff, over the gorge a thousand feet below.

The merchant posted Khlit in the rear of the caravan and bade him keep a keen watch over the path behind them. So it happened that the Cossack knew they were followed.

He could see black dots moving along the face of the cliff a mile in the rear. What their pursuers were he could not tell. He counted three dots and so reported to Pir Kasim, who alternately cursed and called upon Allah to hasten their progress.

It was unwise to hurry over the evil footing, where a sheer drop fell to the rocks below, beside a freshet that roared down the cleft of the gorge, sending up a steam of spray in which the sun formed the splendid arch of a rainbow. Once a led horse stumbled and vanished over the brink with a shrill neigh of terror. But Pir Kasim did not slow their gait.

Khlit was riding in the rear of the women. He saw how they shivered at sight of the unfortunate horse. The altitude was affecting them, and they sat miserably in their saddles, hunched under their robes.

Once the rearmost of the group threw back her cloak. Khlit saw her lift her veil and recognized her as the Hindustani of the bracelets. For a moment she stared back at him, her beautiful face wan, and circles under the dark eyes.

Then she jerked the rein of her horse. Khlit saw the beast stumble, rear, and plunge headlong from the path.

A wail from the women and an oath from Pir Kasim. Khlit himself stiffened in his saddle with surprize. The woman had done the thing deliberately.

"*Akh*, the cloud of madness gripped her spirit," mourned the merchant. "Yet why was it written that she should be the one to fall? Allah knows she wore the costliest bracelets.

"*Akh*—I let her keep the ornaments, for she had been the wife of the Maharaja of Guzurat. And this is the reward of my mercy. Verily, it is an evil fate!"

Complaining querulously, Pir Kasim halted the caravan and ordered one of the caravaneers to climb down a cleft in the cliff—a perilous path—and recover the gems the woman wore.

Nasir Beg protested, but the merchant did not cease to wail about his loss.

"Oh, evil hour!" he cried, twisting his beard. "Oh, verily the dust of ill fortune strews my path! A horse! One of the fairest of the women!

"And then, by the beard of the Prophet—the gems. Such gems! Gifts from the dead monarch himself. A fool of fools was I to let her keep them when she begged that they should rest on her limbs——"

"Verily," swore Nasir Beg loudly, "you are witless to linger here when riders follow along the path. If it be the Moslem——"

"Peace!"

Pir Kasim glanced sharply from the Arab to Khlit. Then more calmly:

"The lawless ones will not attack where the path admits of but one man."

He left Nasir Beg to watch the trail with Khlit while he peered eagerly down the cleft, marking the difficult progress of the man he had sent after the jewels.

It was long before the caravaneer returned to the ledge. Pir Kasim seized the jewels avidly and examined them, mourning when he saw a dent or break in the gold made by the fall.

"Wretch! Scorpion!" he cried. "All are not here. There was a diamond—a blue damond set in jade that she wore about her throat. Faithless dog——"

"Nay, master," said the man stoutly. "Even as I took them from the body they are here."

The merchant counted over the bloodied trinkets and insisted that the diamond brooch was missing. But the caravaneer obstinately denied having it. Khlit, who was watching keenly, saw Nasir Beg's

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hand go to his throat and fumble at the opening of his cloak, then steal to his girdle. The Arab had taken something from his neck and placed it in a pouch at his waist.

And Khlit knew that the caravaneer had not found the brooch upon the body of the woman.

The dispute delayed them, and it was late afternoon before they reached a plateau where the trail widened to a ledge, upon which certain caverns faced, spacious enough to shelter the party.

So great was the cold that night that Nasir Beg was obliged to keep the fire going in spite of the scarcity of fuel which they had been forced to bring on the donkeys.

Khlit had taken the first watch, and sat slightly down the cliff-path between two rocks where he was in shadow.

He had seen no more of the three who followed in the path of the caravan. Perhaps they had turned aside. Yet, he thought, there was no other trail.

Unless they had turned back the horsemen were still close in their rear. Khlit did not doubt that they sought the caravan. Otherwise they would hardly have taken the hazardous way around the Zodjila Pass, which Nasir Beg had contemptuously dubbed a "goat-path."

Moreover if their purpose had been friendly the three would have ridden up to the caravan when it halted. Khlit wondered briefly whether they had paused to go down the cleft to examine the body of the woman.

He wondered who the three were. Surely they were bold, for they were but three and there were six armed men—not counting Mustafa—in the caravan.

He sat up alertly at a slight sound—a light footstep. It came slowly over the rocks, from what quarter he could not decide. He half-drew his sword.

Then slipped it back into its scabbard with a grunt. He saw the slim figure of the Mohammedan girl—she who had been tentmate with the Hindu—standing before him in the glow from the firelight.

Her veil was back and she seemed to peer eagerly into the darkness down the trail. She looked back over her shoulder at the fire, and Khlit saw that horror was mirrored in her tense face—the face of an anxious girl, fearful and yet wistful.

She crouched as if afraid of being seen and began to move slowly past him. Khlit could hear her quick breathing.

She did not see him, as he was in deep shadow. But she seemed to be looking anxiously to mark his position. Evidently she was aware that a guard was posted near her but did not know the spot.

Then at the sound of heavy, hurried footsteps she sank to the ground. Mustafa appeared, framed against the firelight, staring out along the trail.

It was some time before he saw the girl; then he gave a shrill exclamation of pleasure.

"Evil wench! Wanton!" cried Mustafa. "So you would steal off as if on indoor slippers like a slave sneaking away to henna-nights! So you would leave me—Mustafa."

The sound of a blow accompanied the name. The girl did not cry out.

"Eh—ungrateful one! You had a thought to follow your mate. *Darisi bashine*—may her millet fall on thy head. Have a care lest her fate is yours—*Bismillah!*"

He cringed and stared as Khlit's tall form loomed over him. Then, seeing who it was, he made as if to strike the girl again. But this time under his nose was the glint of steel, and he felt a keen blade touch his throat.

"Enough, Mustafa!" growled the Cossack.

The eunuch peered at him angrily.

"Will you come between me and my duty? Am I a slave to be commanded by such as you—a hired swordsman——"

"Yet a swordsman, Mustafa, and not a beater of women. Is it enough, or will you prove my words?"

At this the eunuch retreated backward and sought the fire. Yasmi did not follow. She took Khlit's hand in both hers.

"*Aie, baba-ji*—father-lord! I have a fear. It is a great fear. Nasir Beg has looked upon me with an evil light in his eyes.

"Last night he came to our tent, and this day Rani Kayastha is dead. Now his glance follows me.

"*Aie*—he took a jewel from Rani Kayastha, who was the wife of a king. But I have no jewels——"

Silently Khlit returned to his nook and sat upon his stone. Yasmi crept after and curled at his feet, much like a dog who fears to be spurned. Khlit rather expected that Mustafa would return with Pir Kasim to claim the girl. But though he glimpsed

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a shadow moving near him and suspected that some one kept watch upon them he was not molested.

"Yasmi," he said slowly, "what manner of women are the wives of nobles, yet the property of such as Pir Kasim?"

"*Baba-ji*," she responded softly, "they are the dead."

For an instant Khlit was disturbed, thinking of the wan face and the dark eyes that had looked into his for an instant before Rani Kayastha died. Then he laughed.

"Nay, you know not what you say, little sparrow. For you are one of them, and you are—living."

But Yasmi did not laugh.

"It is true," she whispered, "that my lot is not quite so evil as theirs. For I am not of their faith and I have not—as they have—broken the law that they must not break.

"But they are truly the dead, and I am like to them. We can not look into the face of the people of Hindustan; where we go we are stoned. The village dogs are higher caste than we. The souls of those—" she pointed back to the camp—"are shriveled. They can not live. They are the dead."

Khlit recollected the stones that had been cast at them when passing through the Kashmiri village, and the strange conduct of the two riders, and grunted.

"Yasmi," he observed presently, "I have a thought that you know those who follow. You are a Moslem, and Nasir Beg named them Moslems. Likewise you crept down the path tonight seeking some one. Is not this the truth?"

The girl would not answer. And after a time Khlit saw that she was shivering with cold. Whereupon he threw his *khalat* over her as she sat by his feet.

Yasmi slept, but Khlit did not close his eyes. The girl's words had stirred his curiosity, and after his fashion he pondered them.

THE next day, and the next, Yasmi kept close to Khlit. His rough touch of kindness—giving her his *khalat*—had been the first she had received for many months and Yasmi was grateful. She kept her pony at the side of the black horse where the narrow track permitted, and at other times in front of Khlit.

On the second day at the noon halt Mustafa approached the two and with him Pir Kasim. Khlit, according to his custom, was preparing his own food, which Yasmi chose to share. Poor as the Cossack's fare was, the caravan fare was worse, now that the mutton was about gone.

Khlit did not look up when the shadows of the two men fell across his feet. He felt the girl draw closer to him.

"Ho, Khlit," began the merchant in a friendly tone, "we make good progress, and by the will of Allah tomorrow will see us through the Darband Pass, and out on the open ground leading to Yarkand. It is well therefore that the women be kept together lest one escape."

Khlit continued to toast the strips of meat in the flames without response.

"Mustafa waxes anxious for the girl Yasmi," continued Pir Kasim. "He fears she may fall from the trail."

"Nay," protested the girl, "my pony does not stumble."

Pir Kasim scowled at her.

"Nevertheless you shall stay under the eye of Mustafa."

"I will not!"

The merchant, angered, caught her arm. She struggled, striking at his face, until Mustafa came to his aid. Then she ceased her efforts, glancing imploringly at Khlit.

The Cossack regarded a portion of meat with a favorable eye and proceeded to eat. Seeing this, Mustafa ventured a furtive blow upon the girl's back.

The eunuch had been reared to safeguard women for his master. It was his one duty, and after his kind he was faithful to it. But he also had the cruelty that was part of his office.

"Pir Kasim," observed Khlit thoughtfully, "would you lay hand on the blue diamond that Rani Kayastha wore?"

The merchant stiffened as a hunting-dog at scent of game. His black eyes snapped, and he stepped closer to the sitting man, fairly quivering with eagerness.

"The blue diamond? Aye, the one that was set in rare jade. 'Tis said the maharaja paid for it the price of twenty fine horses."

He stared at Khlit uncertainly, yet covetously.

"Then it was not lost with the woman—may her soul never see paradise? Aye, it was a fine stone. You have seen it, Khlit?"

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The Cossack chewed slowly on his meat, wiping his beard with his sleeve.

"Perchance you hold it, Khlit?"

Pir Kasim affected a friendly laugh.

"Nay, 'tis well. You thought to keep the stone safe for me. By the beard of the Prophet, I bear no ill-will. Eh—but it would be safer in my hands."

Khlit nodded. Pir Kasim stretched out a claw that trembled with eagerness. He had completely forgotten the girl.

"Ask Nasir Beg for it," said Khlit.

Pir Kasim blinked. Then with an angry cry he hurried off to seek the Arab. Khlit looked up at Mustafa under shaggy brows, and the eunuch made as if to haul Yasmi away.

"Mustafa!" said Khlit. "Look behind you."

The eunuch glanced over his shoulder hastily.

"What see you?" asked Khlit, reaching for more meat.

"Naught. Save the precipice."

"Nay. Your eyes are dull. I have seen two things in the gorge below."

Mustafa glanced at the Cossack dubiously. Then, still holding Yasmi, he stepped nearer the edge to peer down. The invisible pursuers who had been barely noticed during the last two days had got upon the nerves of the men of the caravan.

"Nay, there is naught," he snarled. "I see only rocks."

"And the kites," amended Khlit. "The rocks and kites—there are the two things of which I thought. It is dark down in the *yar;* perhaps the bones of dead horses lie among the rocks, and the place is a feasting-place for the kites."

Mustafa drew back from the cliffside with some alacrity.

"Look, Mustafa, upon your hand!"

The eunuch did so uncertainly. He had a plump hand, generously adorned with rings. After considering this member of his person he glared at Khlit.

"Your tongue jests," he cried shrilly.

"Nay, Mustafa, when did you know me to jest?"

Whereupon Khlit took his sword from scabbard and laid it across his knees, stroking the blade meditatively against one leather boot.

"Harken, O Purified One," continued Khlit, addressing the eunuch by his actual name. "Consider those three things—and a fourth. Consider the rocks a bow-shot beneath, the kites and the tenderness of your skin. Mark it well."

Mustafa still glared but was silent. Yasmi laughed softly.

"And then the fourth thing, Mustafa. You said that I jest. It is a lie."

The eunuch loosed his hold upon Yasmi abruptly. Whereupon she slipped to Khlit's side, her dark eyes dancing at the discomfiture of her guardian. Mustafa would have left them to go after Pir Kasim, but a glance from Khlit stayed him.

"*Kukuria*—little dog," the Cossack growled, "you would like to run whining to your master——"

"Pir Kasim will see that you suffer——"

"Nay, Mustafa. Consider yet another thing. Tomorrow Pir Kasim plans to attack those who follow us. I am—as you once said—a swordsman, and valuable to him. You are a servant."

The eunuch bit his thumb and scowled.

"Then, Mustafa, meditate upon these four—these five things. But chiefly upon the rocks and the kites and your—hide, Mustafa."

Khlit rose, towering over the stout Ethiopian.

"A fitting place to meditate, O Purified One, is the precipice edge. Seek it!"

Not until Mustafa was enthroned upon the brink of the cliff, his legs hanging over the edge—to the wonder of the caravaneers—did Khlit leave him and return to his interrupted repast.

Yasmi's merriment at the plight of her master vanished swiftly, and she gazed moodily into the flames, chin upon her hand. Khlit also was silent.

He had felt when he first saw the women in the caravan that they would breed trouble. Now it was coming to pass even as he had foreseen. But the hardships inflicted on Yasmi stirred his anger.

Khlit glanced around. The others were resting on their robes, wearied by the hard marches and the poor food. Pir Kasim and Nasir Beg were not to be seen, although their angry voices echoed somewhere behind the rocks where the Arab was on watch. Mustafa, although eying them, was beyond hearing.

"My heart is heavy, *baba-ji,*" mused Yasmi. "I have a foreboding. Last night the jackals howled in the gorge, and the

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kites screamed at dawn; and the sky was red as blood.

"Smoke came from the arrow Nasir Beg shot fruitlessly at a mountain goat. I dreamed that headless men walked toward us from the hill-passes."

She sighed, twisting her fingers in the mass of her black hair. And she glanced involuntarily back along the cliff—a look which Khlit did not fail to notice. He put his gnarled hand on her slim one.

"Yasmi," he growled, "you are a sparrow; nay, a singing bird. Aye, the talons of the hawks are near to you. Speak, then, before it is too late.

"There is one thing I would know. Who are they that follow us?"

The girl searched Khlit's lined face with a woman's intentness. What she saw must have satisfied her, for she told him what had passed at the tavern in Srinagar.

Khlit listened closely.

"Say you this Afghan warrior paid Nasir Beg the price he asked?"

"Nasir Beg made an excuse and did not take the gold."

"What did the Afghan?"

"The mask of anger fell upon his face, *baba-ji*, but then Nasir Beg thrust the lamp to the floor, and Mustafa, reaching from behind the curtains, seized me. I kicked and bit his arm.

"Yet he stifled me with a cloth, and bore me down into the cellar. Whereupon Nasir Beg kicked the women and bade them prepare to leave the cellar.

"He rowed us away in the boat. I looked back and saw the Afghan running from the door, and his sword was drawn."

She sighed, looking up at Khlit.

"I think it is he who follows. He was very angry, and—he liked my song. He was a tall man—as tall as you—and his armor was very costly."

"Aye. He was a Moslem?"

"Even so, my lord. Methinks he was faithful to the law of Mohammed, as was my father."

"These women—" Khlit nodded toward the group—"what is their faith?"

"They are unbelievers, who bow down before Vishnu and Shiva. Yet they are not godless. Their sorrow is great. The heat of the flames affrighted them, *baba-ji*, and they drew back from death—and so fell into the hand of the *hallal khors*."

"They do not wish to be sold at Yarkand?"

"Nay, my lord. They are of high caste, and their grief is like a cloud over the sun. But how could they escape Pir Kasim? Even like to theirs will my fate be."

Khlit did not answer. Presently, seeing the bustle of the caravan men, he arose and went to the eunuch, telling him that he had meditated sufficiently for the nonce.

Mustafa made off promptly, muttering. Khlit smiled grimly when Pir Kasim directed the order of march and placed him with Yasmi in the center of the line, giving the rear to Nasir Beg. He noticed also that the servants kept watch on him.

Pir Kasim, however, made a great show of cordiality toward the Cossack. He rode at the warrior's side, explaining that he had recovered the gem from Nasir Beg—at a price.

"Tomorrow, Khlit," he vouchsafed, "will the path widen into the plateau of the Darband. 'Tis a wide, level expanse of stone, open to the eye. At the farther end, however, a swift stream rushes. Beyond the stream are many great rocks of sandstone."

He smiled, combing his beard.

"In those rocks we will lie in wait—you and I and Nasir Beg with the caravaneers. Only at one point—where the trail crosses—can the stream be forded. When the three unbelievers appear, we will see, and when they urge their horses into the current we will let fly arrows and pistol-balls, aimed at the horses.

"Then—may Allah will it so—we shall ride forth and smite down those who live. Thus we shall be free of the robbers. It is a good plan."

The project was well conceived, as Khlit saw. But his voice was gruff as he answered the merchant.

"Have you seen those who follow us—near at hand?"

"Nay. You know they have kept shrewdly beyond view."

"How know you then they are—robbers?"

Pir Kasim stared, then laughed.

"What else should they be, Cossack? Were they honest folk they would not lurk behind the rocks."

Khlit did not laugh. He pointed to the women who followed them, hunched miserably in their saddles.

"What manner of women be these?"

"Slaves."

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"Then, Pir Kasim, have you paid the full value of their slavery?"

The merchant was too surprized to respond quickly. He had not thought that Khlit was interested in the caravan. Before he could answer Khlit turned on him, his teeth gleaming through his gray mustache and his eyes hard.

"Can you say, Pir Kasim, that you are less a thief than those who follow?"

He scowled moodily and struck his fist on the saddle-peak so that the black pony jumped.

"Yasmi has a foreboding, Pir Kasim. Nay, I know naught of omens. But take care lest the evil fortune she has foretold comes to pass."

With that he spurred on to the head of the caravan, leaving the merchant sunk in thought. Pir Kasim dropped back until he was abreast of Nasir Beg.

"The wretched Yasmi has been using her tongue upon Khlit," he whispered. "The Cossack waxes insolent, Nasir Beg.

"What think you? If he rides to Yarkand he may breed evil for us. Yet we need him to deal with the Moslems."

"When the hour comes I shall strike the Cossack. Then the name of Khlit will be no more than the writing on sand when the wind has passed over."

Pir Kasim nodded shrewdly.

"Bethink you, Nasir Beg. There will be much confusion when we ride upon the Moslems. Perhaps it is written that Khlit should die by the hand of the unbelievers.

"If not—" he measured his words slowly— "it may even then come to pass. A blow in the back—Khlit wears no armor—or an arrow at the base of the brain. The Cossack is a foolhardy dog—he will be in the front of the fight, eh, Nasir Beg?"

The Arab's eyes gleamed.

"*Bismillah!* I have a mind to his black horse and the curved sword. Yet—I have heard tales of Khlit. A price should be paid for such a deed—a good price. The blue diamond of the rani."

Pir Kasim squealed angrily.

"Nay, by the beard of the Prophet!"

He considered a moment, glancing sidewise at his companion.

"Yet I am generous, Nasir Beg. Methinks there is a thing other than jewels you have a mind to. If Khlit dies at the Darband you shall have—Yasmi."

"So, be it," agreed the Arab.

THERE was a good reason why Pir Kasim had not seen Abdul Dost near at hand for some time. The Afghan was not there to be seen.

From the night at the Srinagar tavern Abdul Dost had pressed the pursuit closely. He had soon ascertained that Pir Kasim had taken the Sindh caravan-route. He had traced the merchant through the village where the caravan had been stoned, and was close upon them when Pir Kasim turned aside by the Zodjila Pass.

This move had checked the Afghans. They soon discovered that Pir Kasim had not continued along the Sindh; but it was the better part of a day before Abdul Dost, chafing under the delay, learned from a shepherd that the caravan had been seen ascending the Zodjila.

When they came into view of those they sought, the caravan was threading the path along the cliff. Abdul Dost, despite his impatience, was too experienced a soldier to venture to attack in such a location. He ordered his men to fall back and keep Pir Kasim in view.

Until the day when Khlit had sat Mustafa on the cliff ledge. Then Abdul Dost went back a space along the trail to a ravine which led to the gorge below and to the broken body of a woman. Down the ravine they had led their horses, and throughout that night they rode quietly along the valley-bed until they had passed the caravan, which was encamped on the mountainside above.

At dawn Abdul Dost halted only long enough to water his horses. Then, munching their graincakes and dates as they rode, they struck through the pine forest that would lead—as one of the soldiers informed him—to the trail Pir Kasim was taking, ahead of the Darband Pass.

"Then will we ride back," explained Abdul Dost grimly, "and come upon them at the ford in the Darband."

But to do this he was forced to cross the stream below the pass, and at that season it was swollen with the melted snows from the heights above. The two men halted, staring at the rush of water and marking the rocks underneath.

"Those who pass here say it can not be crossed, save at the Darband ford," they told the *mansabdar*.

Abdul Dost glanced up at the sun which was slanting through the pines and smiled.

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"Then," he laughed, "it will be told how the Darband stream has been crossed."

He did not laugh as he forced his horse into the stream and saw how the beast drifted down with the current. The two men hesitated, then plunged in after him. The bad footing and the strength of the current soon forced the horses to swim.

Three men and two horses crossed the stream. The third beast floundered in the current with a broken leg until its rider drew his knife and ended its pain; then this man swam ashore, holding to the tail of another horse. Abdul Dost waited, for the two remaining mounts were badly winded.

Before noon he was again in his saddle. The dismounted warrior girded his tunic about his loins and ran, clinging to the stirrup of his comrade. For Abdul Dost had said they must hasten if they would reach the Darband in time.

"Eh, my children," smiled Abdul Dost, "I have sworn an oath. Shall I not keep my word?"

"We are your men, Lord of Badakshan," spoke up one, "and our swords are yours that your word may be kept. We will pray that our strength be increased."

So they spurred forward. But the sun was high when they neared the caravan-track beyond the Darband Pass.

V

Only for the space of a moment can a warrior say, "I am the slayer and he the slain."

He hears the joy-cries of the women at his wedding feast, and his dull ears harken to the lamentation at his death-bed. Always the voices of the women cry out. Nay, are they not the hand-maidens of Life and Death?—*Kashmiri proverb.*

THE sun filled the Darband Pass with a red light—red because it was reflected from an expanse of sandstone that made the bed of the pass level as the court of a palace.

High in the Himalayas was the Darband Pass, walled by slopes of brown sand that were in turn surmounted by crumbling brown cliffs, beyond which glittered the blue expanse of the glaciers that filled the ravines descending from the rock-peaks.

No grass grew in the Darband Pass; nor did pine-trees fringe the sand-slopes. The only life was that of the kites and rooks who circled overhead, following the course of the caravan. In and about the Darband was the great silence of the heights, broken only at the farther end where the stream rushed down through the rocks.

The ford at this point was shallow; the opposite side, strewn with sandstone ledges and gullies, was steep. Pir Kasim marked this with a satisfied eye. He urged the women and the laden beasts hastily over the stream.

Mustafa, sensing the need of haste—so that they should be in their hiding-places before the pursuers appeared—cried angrily at the women, striking one with his hand when her horse delayed in the stream to snatch a mouthful of water.

"Get you hence, wanton," he commanded, and did not see the glint of hatred intensified by terror in the Hindu's eyes.

Yasmi he did not strike, contenting himself with a mocking whisper.

"Tale-bearer and infidel, soon you will have a new lord and then you will feel the hand of Mustafa."

She passed by in silence—unusual for her—and glanced back at Khlit. Her eyes met the glance of the Cossack and he nodded as if approvingly. Whereupon she urged her horse up the steep slope.

Here were the sandstone gullies, a honeycomb of fissures and grotesque summits of the weather-worn stone. Yasmi fancied that each ledge bore upon it the semblance of a face—some leering evilly, some grinning. Some resembled animals.

It was as if the gigantic creatures of a long-dead race had here been frozen into immobility. They stood watching the passing of the beasts and men of the caravans—so Yasmi fancied.

But Pir Kasim was well content. In the sandstone gullies were hiding-places aplenty. The merchant disposed of the caravan swiftly and with much shrewdness.

On the top of the rise he placed the horses and donkeys in a ravine the steep sides of which afforded exit at only one point. He commanded the women to remain here and at the entrance to the gully posted a caravaneer armed with a bow as guard.

Pir Kasim cared to take no chances with Khlit, so he had selected the place with care—a depression into which the sun shone fully, where the guard could watch both women and horses without moving.

"Because, Nasir Beg," he whispered to the

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Arab, "it is said the Cossack is like an evil magician with the black horse between his legs. Aye, like to a conjurer who can summon the powers of darkness, and the horse his *jinnee*. But here he will be afoot among the rocks."

Not less craftily did the merchant arrange his men. He chose the rocks just where the trail rose to the summit of the slope by the river-bank.

Here they were a scant fifty paces from the horses—which were of course out of sight—and even less from the edge of the stream. They could see down the length of the Darband and watch their enemies as the latter rode up to the ford—as Pir Kasim believed they must do.

"Then, Khlit," he smiled, rubbing his hands together, "a volley of arrows—a shot from Nasir Beg's Turkish pistol—and all is done. Save the slaying of the wounded. It is a good plan."

"Aye," admitted Khlit.

"And you—" Pir Kasim's keen eyes were fastened on the Cossack's girdle—"where are your pistols? Eh—there were two fine weapons that you are wont to wear——"

"I have them not today," explained Khlit indifferently. "The sword, the curved sword, is the better weapon."

"Good!"

Pir Kasim had reason to be satisfied. Without his pistols Khlit would be an easy victim, he reasoned. The Cossack wore no armor, not even a quilted surcoat. Even if he should suspect treachery and try to defend himself he would be one against six—and Nasir Beg and the caravaneers had shirts of Damascus mail.

Pir Kasim was shrewd enough to perceive that Khlit was distrustful of him. The Cossack's words of the day before had served to put the merchant on his guard. He counted on the fact that Khlit would be stirred by the attack on their pursuers and would be taken unawares.

"If not," he confided to Nasir Beg, "he will be afoot, and crafty though he be at sword-play my two men have orders to strike him down with their arrows. What avails a sword against arrows? Nay, he was a fool to put aside the Turkish pistols!"

"Even thus," suggested Nasir Beg, "it would be well to find those two weapons and take them in your hand."

Pir Kasim scurried off to ransack the saddle-bags of Khlit's horse, leaving the Cossack surrounded by his men. His hasty search was unsuccessful, yet it gave him opportunity to see that all was well by the horses.

The women sat muffled in their robes at the feet of the guard—Yasmi among them, as Pir Kasim was careful to note. The horses were tethered securely. The caravaneer stood at the break in the sandstone ridge which was the only entrance to the gully.

Fearful lest his enemies appear while he was absent, Pir Kasim ran back to the ambush over the river-bank. Khlit had not moved.

The Cossack sat idly on a rock where he was concealed from view from the ford, Nasir Beg within arm's reach on one side, the Arab's hand near the pistol in his belt. Mustafa leaned near by, holding a sharp knife.

Within five paces of the three the caravaneers kept watch over the ford, their bows strung and their quivers ready to hand. Pir Kasim, like the eunuch, was armed with a knife. The merchant chuckled silently.

"*Akh*," he muttered in his beard, "the dolt! The tall fool of the steppe! The fox that is blind! The wolf that has seen many fights, who is heedless of peril thereby! *Akh*, another hour, and the three who follow will lie dead in the ford and Khlit will be overmastered. Then—I shall repeat the *namaz gar*—the evening prayer. For Allah favors me this day."

He surveyed the scene again before joining Nasir Beg. So well had he planned that a thrill of self-satisfaction chased up his bent spine. After all Pir Kasim was an artist in his way—a master of treachery.

"Another hour, my lord," he smiled at Khlit, "and the way to Yarkand will be clear. Then rich gold will be ours from the women."

"Aye?" said Khlit.

Pir Kasim nodded, thinking that Yasmi had foretold truly when she said that she had beheld evil omens. He watched Khlit contentedly.

The Cossack was stroking his bare blade back and forth over his boot-top, and polishing the shining steel with his neck-cloth. He was fingering the chasing in the blade with evident pride, his long legs sprawled before him, his sheepskin hat well to the back of his gray head.

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And at this hour the sun was near its highest point.

Then Yasmi began her song.

IT CAME clearly down to the waiting men. It echoed melodiously among the rocks of the Darband. And it was echoed back from the farther side of the ford—each word distinct:

"Oh, where is the falcon's nest....
Save in the wind...."

The song swelled forth with the full power of the girl's throat. And it seemed to mock the men as if Yasmi sang with the lilt of laughter. At the same time there was a murmur as if the women were stirring.

"*Bismillah!*" swore Pir Kasim. "Has the caravaneer taken leave of his wits that he lets Yasmi sing? Mustafa, go you and choke the song in the vixen's throat! Fail not, for there must be silence at the ford."

The eunuch needed no second bidding. Clutching his dagger, he stole off up to the gully where the women were.

Pir Kasim scowled at Khlit, wondering if the Cossack had had a hand in the girl's singing. Yasmi, he reflected suspiciously, might have intended to warn their pursuers of the ambush.

But Khlit sat passively gazing at his feet and stroking his weapon. Perhaps a trace of a smile twitched at his gray mustache.

Presently Yasmi's voice faltered in the midst of a word. Silence followed broken by a faint murmur of voices in their rear. Pir Kasim peered across the ford and noted with satisfaction that the three riders were not yet in view.

"Mustafa has stilled the songbird," he whispered to Nasir Beg, "and doubtless bound and gagged her as she deserved——"

He broke off in sheer surprize. Yasmi had resumed her song at the point where she had ceased. Even louder than before the girl's voice floated down from the rocks above them.

"By the ninety-nine holy names of Allah!" swore the Arab. "Will you let the wanton betray our abiding-place?"

Khlit alone of the men at the ford seemed not surprized at the song of Yasmi. He pulled his sheepskin hat over one ear and glanced up solemnly at the sun.

Pir Kasim fidgeted in an agony of impatience. Their enemies, he knew, might even then be within hearing.

Yasmi must be silenced. He looked once more across the ford, and at Khlit basking his tall frame in the sun; then he stole off to the rear toward the women.

Nasir Beg looked after him, scowling. What had become of Mustafa and the guard, that they let Yasmi sing? He did not understand.

There was something uncanny in the note of the song. And Yasmi——

"The Moslem girl is an evil enchantress," he growled to Khlit. "*Bismillah*, she has laid a spell with her song on the caravaneer and Mustafa."

Khlit responded quietly, leaning closer to the Arab.

"Aye, a spell, Nasir Beg. A spell of steel and powder. Yasmi has one of my brace of Turkish pistols. The mate to the weapon is in the hand of a Hindu woman—the same Mustafa struck in the ford."

"Ha!"

Nasir Beg looked up keenly and rose to his feet.

"A potent spell, Nasir Beg. Doubtless it has rendered the caravaneer and the dog of a eunuch powerless, each in turn, while the women bound them. And—doubtless—Pir Kasim has come under the spell. Did not Yasmi sing that he might hear?"

The two caravaneers gaped. Nasir Beg fingered his weapon. Khlit had neither moved nor looked at him.

"Pistols have their use, Nasir Beg," he mused calmly. "Aye, Yasmi uses them boldly. But for my hand, Nasir Beg—the curved sword."

He drew the cloth along the shining blade carefully. The three men watched him as if fascinated.

"The sword, Nasir Beg," said Khlit, "that you covet—with the black pony—after you had slain the Cossack who is called the Curved Saber. Aye, so Yasmi told me, and her ears are keen to hear——"

Nasir Beg caught at the pistol in his belt. Then, just in time, he snatched out his sword instead.

Khlit had struck without rising from his seat. Leaning toward the Arab, his long arm flew out. Though Nasir Beg partly parried the blow a crimson cut showed

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above the man's brow where Khlit's sword had touched—no more than touched—the skin.

AND even as the wound in the Arab's forehead was the weakness that seized upon his heart. A crafty and experienced swordsman, Nasir Beg fought best when the odds were in his favor. Now, in the eyes that burned into his from under gray brows, he read—death.

So he gave back swiftly, parrying desperately. And as he gave back Khlit was upon him, the curved saber slashing at his throat above the armor.

"So, Nasir Beg," Khlit growled softly, "you coveted the sword? Nay, have it then. So the girl Yasmi was to be your slave? Nay, the steel is your reward, for—treachery, Nasir Beg."

And Khlit's weapin flashed before his eyes. Nasir Beg cursed, giving ground again. Then, feeling the blood stream down into his eys, the fear that had clutched at his heart overmastered him.

"Let fly, dolts!" he screamed to the staring caravaneers. "An arrow in his back——"

The cry ended in a grunt which changed to a gasp that shrilled and broke midway. Khlit had smitten down the Arab's guard and poised his sword for the death-stroke. An arrow whizzed and tore through the Cossack's boot below the knee.

Khlit shifted his weight silently to the other foot, placing himself so that the Arab was between him and the archers, feinted at Nasir Beg's head and struck him savagely across the knees. The Arab staggered, cursing.

The next instant he threw his arms wide, his skull split between the eyes nearly to the chin. Khlit wheeled alertly, hearing stealthy steps behind him. A caravaneer had crept within arm's reach, dagger uplifted.

The Cossack, who was fighting with the cool intentness that was peculiar to him, had expected such a move, and the man fell back. His neck had been half-severed by a short stroke of the curved saber. Khlit reached behind him and pulled the sinking body of Nasir Beg between him and the second caravaneer. And the arrow the man aimed embedded itself in the form of the Arab.

Holding Nasir Beg in one arm—his sword-arm—Khlit felt for and found the pistol in the Arab's girdle. Before the archer could fit another arrow to bow, the pistol bellowed in his face, sending its heavy ball through his brain.

Khlit cast down the smoking weapon, watching the man reel to the earth. A shrill cry from Yasmi came to his ears. He caught the arrow that had pierced his lower leg, broke it and limped upward through the rocks.

He heard a shout, the beat of hoofs. A horse plunged forward into view, sweating and sobbing with weariness—plunged and fell. A mailed form sprang clear, casting aside a flying cloak that glittered with jewels.

The newcomer alighted on his feet, gained his balance deftly and sprang at Khlit with uplifted simitar.

Khlit caught a fleeting glimpse of a small, jeweled turban, a silvery coat of mail and a dark, scarred face, dust-stained and alight with the joy of battle. He saw white teeth bared in a smile, and black eyes that bored into his.

"*Hai—hai*—look to yourself, graybeard! Stealer of women and seller of the death-anointed! Ho—graybeard—Pir Kasim! The thread of your life is thin. Oho—look upon the angel of death, Pir Kasim——"

The whirlwind attack of the warrior left Khlit no time to consider or to speak. The next instant he was fighting for his life, his saber crossing a blade that had an arm of steel behind it.

Many times and often had Khlit fought with the swordsmen of Tartary and Hindustan, but now he was faced by a master of the simitar and one who fought as recklessly as Khlit himself.

The two retainers who had scrambled down over the rocks, panting, looked upon the combat and paused, observing the play of the blades with eagerness, and staring one upon the other in wonder.

"*Hai—hai*—" Khlit's hat had been struck from his head and his fur *khalat* slashed by a glancing blow—" I have trimmed your scalp, graybeard; look to your beard."

A blow of the simitar nearly found Khlit's throat.

"Oho, so, and so, does Abdul Dost keep his pledge!"

For several moments the two swords held in never ceasing play.

And ever Khlit grew weaker, his knees

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trembling with fatigue. No chance was afforded him for a trick of the sword, nor any respite.

The lean muscles of the Cossack's long arm were quivering, and his vision blurred. Still the simitar flashed almost in his eyes.

He did not give ground. Nor did he speak. He smiled upon Abdul Dost.

Then the two watchers saw a strange thing. They saw Khlit exhausted and at the point of death. They noted that Abdul Dost was panting, fighting with savage intentness. And they saw the man whose strength had ebbed gather himself together, limping, his weight upon one leg.

And Khlit sprang at Abdul Dost with the curved saber gripped in both hands, hacking and hewing, beating down the other's weapon, slashing at his mail so that the sparks flew from the steel. Then Abdul Dost sprang back.

The two watchers saw Khlit sink upon his knees and the saber fall from his hand and his head fall upon his chest. The last effort of the Cossack had exhausted the remnant of his strength and had blinded him.

Abdul Dost surveyed his foe, panting and half-stunned by the unexpected attack.

Then a small figure rushed upon the Moslem, and Yasmi cast her arms around him.

"*Ai*, lord—stay your hand!" she cried. "This is not Pir Kasim. The dog of a merchant has fled afoot up the mountain. Nay, this is he who took my quarrel upon him, my *baba-ji*—father-lord."

Abdul Dost was quick of wit. He sheathed his weapon. Then he stared around, marking the bodies of Nasir Beg and the caravaneers. He wiped the sweat from his brow and seated himself wearily upon a stone.

One of his men approached.

"The eunuch will watch no more women, Lord of Badakshan," he informed Abdul Dost grimly. "He was in the hands of the women and—the hatred of the high-born is not akin to mercy."

Abdul Dost stirred the form of the Arab with his foot and glanced up at Yasmi, who was watching him fearfully.

"Rightly have they named this the caravan of the dead, little Yasmi. My eyes tell me the truth of this and what I have seen I have seen."

ABDUL DOST rose, not oversteadily, and stared at Khlit, who still rested on his knees, drawing gulping breaths.

"Did the hand of this warrior slay these three?" he asked.

Yasmi looked around with a shiver.

"Aye, my lord."

"What name bears he?"

"He is Khlit, who has come from very far. It is said he was once Kha Khan of the Jun-gar, and leader of the Tatar horde. He it was who brought Nur-Jahan, wife of the Mogul, from China. He is my *baba-ji*."

Abdul Dost leaned over Khlit and lifted him to his feet. He noted the arrow in the Cossack's leg and swore under his breath.

Then he helped Khlit to a seat on the stone where he had been resting. Yasmi noticed the Cossack's sword lying on the earth and would have picked it up, but a sharp command from the Moslem stayed her.

Motioning the girl aside, Abdul Dost picked up Khlit's weapon, wiped it clean, weighed it curiously in his hand and laid it across the other's knees. Khlit glanced up at this, for the stupor of weariness had passed from his sight.

"Hey—it was a good fight, warrior," the Cossack said.

His head sank once more between his shoulders. He lifted a lean hand and gazed wonderingly upon its trembling.

"I have met many swordsmen in Hindustan and in Badakshan," responded Abdul Dost gruffly, "but none equal to you. Aye, it was rare sword-play. Yet was the fault mine, for I—in armor—set upon you unknowing——"

Khlit shook his head indifferently. The lines of his harsh face had deepened within the hour. Then he sought to take his sword but could not, for his strength was gone.

His head sank again, near to his knee. He lifted it with an effort.

"I shall not wield sword again, warrior," he said, breathing heavily. "The strength that was once mine is gone. My arm is weak. Something that was here—is sped."

He touched his chest.

"You—overmastered me. It is my last fight."

Abdul Dost would have spoken but checked himself. He turned aside, musing.

"The blame is mine," he said to Yasmi. "I would that I had known."

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He ascended the rocks, for there was much to be done. In an hour he had arranged for Yasmi and the other women to be conducted back to the territory of her father, the Sheikh of Kuhistan, by way of the northern passes, and had mounted them under escort of his two followers, for food was lacking in the caravan and their departure was pressing.

"None will molest my men, who will go by the route through Badakshan," he told Yasmi. "And in the camp of your people these women may have peace."

"Aye, my lord," assented Yasmi.

When she would have knelt and poured forth her thanks the *mansabdar* stayed her gruffly.

"Go—and sing among your hills, little Yasmi," he bade her. "Here is but an evil spot for such as you. In Kuhistan young warriors will give you their love, doubtless."

Khlit raised his head as the caravan moved off. He saw that his horse was not among those that went. Then he fell again into meditation, for he was very weary and his wound pained him.

He wondered why Abdul Dost had not gone with the caravan. Then he saw the *mansabdar* approach with his cloak again on his shoulders.

Khlit lifted his hand. He was not troubled at being left alone, but he was very tired and he wondered—without being concerned—whether Abdul Dost had thought to leave him food.

"Farewell, warrior," he said gruffly. "Ho — it was indeed a good fight."

Abdul Dost did not reply. He was carrying an armful of wood. This he laid on the ground and presently kindled into flames by use of his flint and tinder. Then he approached the Cossack and drew off his boot.

He cleansed and washed Khlit's wound with water from the ford after drawing the arrow-head, which Khlit suffered him to do silently. This accomplished, he bound the leg with some strips of cloth tightly.

By now the fire was blazing. Abdul Dost returned and presently came back carrying many things.

He laid Khlit's sheepskin robe on the ground near the fire, and his own beside it. He drew some meat from his saddle-bags and began to toast it on a stick in the flames.

By now it was twilight, and the Darband was in deep shadow. Abdul Dost helped Khlit to lie on his sheepskin.

"Eh, Khlit," he said, "the horses are fed, and it is now our turn."

Not until then did the Cossack understand that Abdul Dost would not leave him. He looked at the Moslem in surprize. Never before had another tended him in this manner, or given him such comfort.

Neither man spoke. But Khlit was strangely content.

He had found a friend, and he who had been named the wanderer was no longer alone.

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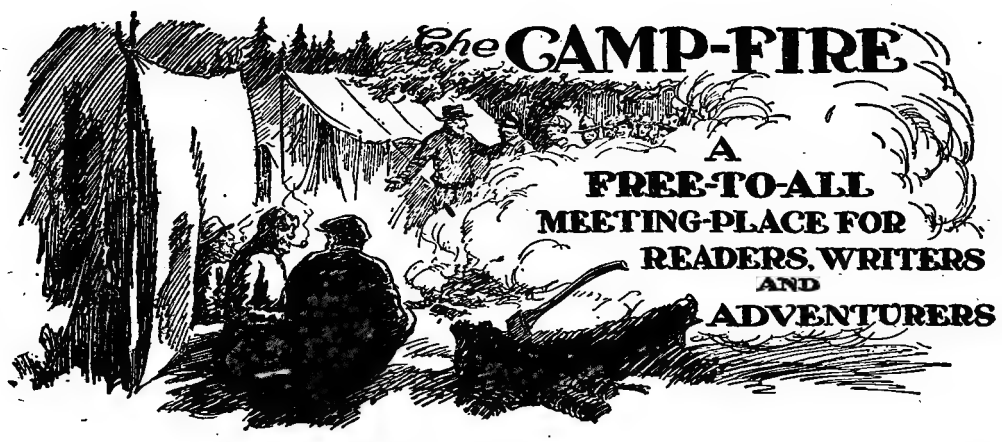

IT LOOKS as if most of you were as much in a "show me" attitude on hoop-snakes as I am. You don't seem to be rallying to the job of proving that hoop-snakes exist. Yet here is Comrade Quinby backing them again and, having known him a long time by correspondence, I have too much respect for his veracity and good sense to pass lightly over what he says.

Graniteville, South Carolina.

Certainly you can publish anything I wrote you about snakes, although I am sorry you seem inclined to doubt the veracity of some of my friends. I am afraid we will have to class you as a doubting Thomas. I'll bet that when you were a kid you did not believe in Santa Claus, nor fairies, goblins nor nuthin'. And I expect that, being a grown man, you don't even believe in ghosts. Well, I believed in all of them, and still believe in some of them to-day.

But in all seriousness, I am sure that the hoop-snake as I wrote you exists, not from personal knowledge, for I admit I am not curious about seeing one, but because I know the parties who told me about them. I understand that there is a variety known as the horn-snake which strikes with its tail. But so far as I know, it does not roll as a hoop.—JAS. L. QUINBY, JR.

THOUGH his talk did not reach us in time for his first story in our magazine, "The Out-of-Dates" in Mid-March, Captain Frank H. Shaw now follows Camp-Fire custom and introduces himself along with his novelette in this issue:

Though born in an inland manufacturing town in Yorkshire, I heard the call of the sea when quite young. Seafaring as a profession was frowned on by those responsible for my future, and medicine was strongly urged as a career, but the craving to be up and away on wide waters was too strong to be overcome and after much argument my desires were gratified.

AT SIXTEEN years of age, I went to sea, in a tramping "windjammer," a three-masted barque, which took me round the world three times in four years, and showed me every phase of the sea. It was a hard life—bitter hard in places—and I suppose I must have wondered a thousand times what inherent madness it was that prompted me to take service afloat. It showed me the world, however, and the ways of ships on the sea. Particularly did these four years teach me much of the ways of men upon the ships; and this learning stood me in good stead in after years.

One great fact was borne in upon me: the surprising lack of knowledge, amongst a people that owes its very existence to the sea, of the conditions of sea-life, and the beauty, the majesty and the terror of the sea. I had in those days no thought of ever being in a position to endeavor to attempt to interpret the realities for the understanding of those who had not seen with their own eyes, but I suppose I must have stowed away impressions and recollections subconsciously; and, hard though the days and months in sailing ships were, I would not have missed a single one of them.

BUT I got out of this windjammer life as soon as it could be managed. A hankering after the rumored greater comforts of steamboat life, perhaps. I passed the second mate's examination and proceeded to sea in cargo-carrying steamers. South America and North America were my beat for two or three years; examinations were passed as they came due; and I was lucky enough to secure an extra-master's certificate of competency when about twenty-three, passing with honors, and at what was then a fairly early age. By this time I considered I had learnt a lot about the humbler side of seafaring and, introduced by my extra certificate, I went in for the Atlantic ferry. The following years were good ones and certain U. S. cities became familiar places to me. I might have taken command of an American yacht, but already the hankering after written expression was beginning to assert itself.

I TRIED my 'prentice hand at a story of the sea—the actual narrative of the mutiny that figured as its central feature had been told me by an old skipper who had taken part in the adventure.

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Sometimes I read that first story again and wonder that any editor ever risked his professional reputation by publishing it. It was without form and void; it was a solid block of writing, ungainly and lacking construction; but it must have possessed some quality of which I was ignorant, for it was accepted and published. I suppose men have been less delighted at discovering a gold-mine than I was when I heard this surprising bit of news. But it altered my life's course completely. The day I saw my own work in print opened out vistas of a new heaven and a new earth. I resolved that I would endeavor to become the mouthpiece of such men as used the sea. An ardent Kiplingite, I vowed to "paint the thing as I saw it." It was not until later that I realized that many people don't want to read of a brutal thing as it really is but as they would like to think it was.

Leisure was a scant possession on the Atlantic ferry, but every spare minute at sea was devoted to writing of the sea. In port I made friends with American newspaper men and I believe I learned a lot regarding my own language and its possibilities from them. And always there was an ever-growing desire to settle down to real writing, to put everything I had into the task. Conflicting with this desire was the old sea maxim—learned in sailing ships—that a man should never let go with one hand until he'd got a secure grip with the other. The sea promised a livelihood; literature was as yet an untried jackstay. So there was nothing to do but plod on at sea, and plod on with the pen—or, to be quite frank—with the typewriter.

I GOT a story accepted in America; another in England. After some eighteen months I discovered that I had doubled my seafaring income by the work of my imagination. Also there were matrimonial hankerings: a girl there was who said that she'd no real desire to be a widow for eleven full months of every year, which is what a sailor's wife really is.

I bade good-by to the sea for a year, and settled down to make a business of writing. If I failed, there was always the sea to go back to, and the promise of a living wage. But I found that I didn't need to go back to sea. Little by little my stories found favor with the editors that link the Bristish reading public with the author. I received letters—from sailors—saying that my stories were salt-water personified; the real thing. One letter I treasure struck me as being a real compliment. The story it dealt with had to do with a delicate piece of seamanship performed under great difficulties. The root idea of the story was to show up in some degree the parsimony of certain ship owners. They had stored their ship with cheap gear. In the middle of the operation I was describing, the rope on which everything depended carried away and the labors of a week were wasted. Said my forecastle correspondent, in dealing with the matter:

"When I read about that rope parting, I sang out: 'Stand from under!' That was one of the pats on the back that make a man realize he is getting hold of his trade.

Since then I have had many letters, approving of or questioning details of seamanship; and the fact grew upon me that I was, to some extent, achieving my set ambition—I was explaining the sea, its ships and its men, to laymen, to the satisfaction of seamen.

CAME then a sea-novel. It got hold, but was far from being a best-seller. An eminent English firm of magazine-publishers wrote asking for work, much work. They got it. They must have liked it, for they asked for more. On the strength of growing success, I married; but I was afraid the sea might call me back; and, cowardliwise, I went and hid in the English Lakeland. More books were written, with varying success. My last book before the war broke out was "The Haven of Desire"—an honest attempt to portray sea-life as it was and is.

I HAD my own opinions concerning a man's duty to his country, and when the war broke out, I was holding a captain's commission in a Territorial unit. I was actually in uniform when the war-clouds broke and mobilization followed swiftly. Now, a man can not be a soldier and an author at the same time, if he wants to be good at either trade. It would have been an easy matter to secure a comfortable, leisurely Staff job, or employment in the Propaganda Department. Instead, I went with my division to France—soldiering had won. It meant a struggle for the family at home to keep their heads above water, but they agreed with me: it was up to every man of a serving age to throw his full weight into the scales.

After a while, however, siege warfare grew monotonous; a desire for greater activity possessed me. I contrived to transfer to the Royal Flying Corps, and served as pilot and flight commander in that Corps in France for a year. I was about twice the average age, but it was an interesting and an exciting experience. And by this time the old-time love of adventure, which had taken me to sea some twenty years and more before, was itching in my veins. I made up my mind to see as many phases of the war as could be seen so long as such seeing could be reconciled with my desire to do the very best I could do for the country. I studied wireless telegraphy and Secret Service work, and took a hand in dealing with the Zeppelin menace. It was all very interesting work, and, I flatter myself, useful work, too—for the country.

BUT somehow the sea kept calling. The years of vagabondage were not yet done. I came across a Navy man; took him for a joy ride along the British front. We discovered a common interest in the sea; he expressed surprise that I, a trained sailor with good qualifications, was content to be soldiering. Later, he wrote from the Admiralty, London, making suggestions and offers. Normally it was about as easy for a man to transfer from Army to Navy as it was for a camel to navigate a needle's eye; but I found the right strings to pull and almost before I realized what had happened, I discovered myself a full-pledged naval officer, busy on great waters in one of the carefully hidden "mystery ships."

I was battering about the Mediterranean in a tiny Italian coasting brigantine when the Armistice was declared, but that simple coaster was in reality a very efficient submarine-killer, heavily armed and heavily manned.

THUS, throughout the war, I contrived to see three dimensions—land, air and sea. I was a fighter more than a spectator; but I was able to store up a valuable assortment of varied experience

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and when I returned to the matter-of-fact existence of a writer again I was prepared to swamp the reading world with thrilling narratives. I found, as many another writer has found, that the reading world was nauseated with war. But this stock-in-trade of actual experiences should come in useful when the historical interest of war comes to its own.

Anyhow, battering about the seas in tiny sailing ships taught me much more than ever I had known before of the sea and the ships upon it; it revealed to me beauties, terrors and majesties never before comprehended. So I do not grudge these varied years.—FRANK H. SHAW.

AS TO the ancient ruins in the Pecos Valley concerning which a comrade inquired at Camp-Fire:

Bellingham, Wisconsin.

H. W. Brown inquires in Camp-Fire about the ruins of ancient Indian structures found in the Pecos Valley of New Mexico. Perhaps I can throw a trifle of light on the subject.

I AM somewhat familiar with such Indian remains in the Pecos Valley along its upper waters in Texas and southward across the mountains and upland plains to the Rio Grande—say 160 miles north and south. Have been over the ground a good many times and frequently have seen the sort of relics Mr. Brown surmised to be a fireplace.

Those which I am familiar with are fireplaces, in a sense, but are called "mescal pits." They are where the Indians, fairly modern tribes, roasted the succulent head or heart of the sotol, which I take to be a low-growing species of the palm. I believe also the yucca head was sometimes roasted. But the sotol contained a juice that when roasted and allowed to ferment slightly turned alcoholic. Eaten or sucked, they supplied an orthodox drunk, putting a buck to sleep for a good many hours. The yucca, I believe, was more of a food, like cabbage.

MESCAL is made today and smuggled over the Rio Grande, though I understand it is not a genuine mescal, and the boys who buy it from the bootleggers call it sotol. It is about the same stuff the Indians made in the pits.

I have seen scores of the pits. They consist of a depression scooped out a foot or so deep and six to twelve feet in diameter. All that I have seen appeared to have been circular when made. There was no central hole two feet or so deep, as Mr. Brown speaks of. The pits were saucer-like. I have no doubt what Mr. Brown refers to is about the same thing, if they were in a country that grows sotol, and I have seen sotol in that region of New Mexico.

THERE are a good many signs of ancient Indian village remains in the region I mentioned above and in the New Mexico country Mr. Brown speaks of. From an investigation of one near Fort Davis, Texas, a hundred miles or so from the New Mexico corner, I, and others better informed, judged them to be the ruins of Indian villages made previous to the time of the modern historical Indians—the Comanches and Apaches—perhaps by the immediate predecessors of the Apaches. This would set a date for their use back about 300 years.

THE presence of such a pit in the region that Mr. Brown described, if no sotol grew there, would be accounted for by the probability that sotol might have grown there 500 years or so ago. In a region with such scant rainfall as it has, the wood at the sides, evidently used at one time for a roof support, might endure five centuries. Mescal pits are frequently found in Texas far from fuel, from water and shelter, but seldom if ever far from plenty of stone. Usually they are where sotol still grows, but sometimes are where it appeared to grow centuries ago.

The Mescalero Apaches, now held on a small reservation in New Mexico, once roamed all this region in question. The word "mescalero" means mescal-maker. The forefather tribe of the Mescalero Apaches was the Tobosos. The Tobosos were given to roasting and fermenting sotol—making mescal. And it is considered most probable that they are responsible for the mescal pits and that they roamed the Southwest 300 years ago back to 500 or 600 years ago.—BARRY SCOBEE.

A WORD from Harold Lamb concerning his story in this issue:

New York.

MOST of us are familiar with the Hindu custom of *suttee*. It prevailed until stamped out by the British—and they had a hard time doing it—in the middle of the last century. Not all of us, perhaps, are aware of the religious significance of the act—the burning of a widow on the funeral fire.

It seems that the widows—often several in number—believed that their voluntary death insured themselves a higher life, according to the doctrine of the transmigration of souls. Thus, if they died in this manner seven times, they became perfect. Most of the women went to the funeral pyre voluntarily, and displayed extraordinary courage. But the Brahmans always had along an orchestra of horns and cymbals to drown the cries of the victim, in case the woman's strength gave way under the ordeal. Also, the priests had long poles ready, to prevent any attempt to escape from the pyre.

AS TO those who did escape the *suttee*, Francois Bernier, the French physician who wandered over India during the seventeenth century, says:

"I have been often in the company of a fair idolater who contrived to save her life by throwing herself upon the protection of the scavengers (*halalkhors*) who assemble on these occasions, when they learn that the intended victim is young and handsome, that her relations are of little note, and that she is to be accompanied by only a few of her acquaintance.

"Yet the woman whose courage fails at the sight of the horrible apparatus of death, and who avails herself of the presence of these men to avoid the impending sacrifice, can not hope to pass her days in happiness, or to be treated with respect.

"Never again can she live with the Hindus; no individual of that nation (religion) will at any time or under any circumstances, associate with a creature so degraded, who is accounted utterly infamous and execrated because of the dishonour which her conduct has brought upon the religion of the country. Consequently she is ever afterward exposed to the ill-treatment of her low and vulgar protectors.

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"There is no Moghul"—(meaning, probably, Mussulman)—"who does not dread the consequences of contributing to the preservation of a woman devoted to the burning pile, or who will venture to offer an asylum to one who escapes from the fangs of the Brahmans. But many widows have been rescued by the Portuguese."

I'm not sure that Mohammedan women were burned, but often slaves were sacrificed with their mistress. The girl of the tale, being a Mohammedan, was not bound to the Hindu ritual.

As for *Abdul Dost*, he was hardly a man to be influenced by the power of the Brahmans. And *Khlit* conducted himself upon the favorite phrase found in U. S. Army instructions—"as circumstances may direct."—HAROLD LAMB.

NOW here's a letter I wish I had dug out of our cache long ago, for it gives practical information I know some of you want. Written shortly after the Armistice. He was serving on the same boat with Patrick Casey of our writers' brigade.

U. S. S. Sub-Chaser 73
Section Base, Cape May, New Jersey.

In Camp-Fire I saw a request for information as to museums and collectors which was referred to the readers. I can help somewhat; I'm (or was) a collector and I have been more or less connected with several museums.

TO BEGIN with, by far the finest natural history collection in the country is in the National Museum at Washington. This museum, however, does not employ collectors, as its collections are kept up by private gifts and by the Biological Survey.

The Smithsonian Institution, however, does employ collectors and send out expeditions—most famous of these was Roosevelt's East African Expedition. Its collections go to the National Museum.

After the National Museum in Washington come the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, the American Museum of Natural History in New York, the Museum of Comparative Zoology of Harvard at Cambridge. These have collections of varying worth—that is, they specialize in different things.

THE Academy of Natural Sciences does not send out collectors. Its staff does the collecting.

The American Museum is now doing more extensive collecting than any other museum in the country, and it is in a position to carry on the more adventurous and continued sorts of work. Roosevelt's South American Museum, Chapin and Lang's seven-year expedition to the interior of the Congo, which brought back nineteen Okapi examples.

The Howard Museum is specializing in the zoology of the West Indies and South America.

THE Carnegie Museum at Pittsburgh, the Peabody Museum of Yale at New Haven, the museum of the Brooklyn Academy are institutions which are either doing more special or more local work and which have not the collections of the larger institutions. Many of the colleges have museums; practically none, however, send out collectors. Cornell is an exception; there they specialize in North American fauna. In the Middle West the Museum of the University of Michigan, the Field Museum at Chicago and the Museum of the University of Indiana do more than local work. In the West the Museum of the California Academy of Sciences at San Francisco and the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology of the University of California at Berkeley are far and away ahead of the rest, though most of the State Universities have museums.

The San Francisco Museum deals with Western animals and with animals of Eastern Asia.

TO SUM up—The big five are the National Museum, the American Museum, the Museum of Comparative Zoology, the Academy of National Sciences and the Field Museum.

I know little of foreign museums.

I should refer your correspondent to the Naturalist's Directory, the new edition of which is now being compiled. The old edition is in any good library.

Possibly your correspondent wished to know about Eastern Asia. Two museums contain almost all the material from Eastern Asia in this country—those at Washington and San Francisco. Mr. Allen Owston's store at Yokohama, and his stock, brought in by native collectors, has provided many of the rarest animals.

As to myself, I am a collector of reptiles and Amphibians, or rather I was, for I am on Subchaser 73 off Cape May, on the same boat with Pat Casey, one of *Adventure's* authors.—EMMETT DUNN.

WHO knows about this Nebraska stone wall apparently built in ancient times?

Birmingham, Alabama.

Who among the Camp-Fire readers know of or have seen the hidden or lost stone wall located in a wash-out or dry cut, two and a half miles north of Chadron, Dawes County, Nebraska? A portion of the wall is to be seen on both banks of the wash-out, of which I am sending two pictures taken twenty-three years ago.

THE rocks of which the wall is built are of sandstone, one and a half foot wide, two and a half feet long, if I remember correctly. I spent a great deal of time searching and probing around that wall and washout, where I herded cows for six Summers in that vicinity, but all I discovered was the fact that the wall was there and must have been for ages, as in the hard, rock-like clay of the washout could be found petrified turtles, snail-shells, pieces of jaw-bones with teeth of different animals, also joints of snakes and fish. Now that was twenty-three years ago and I am anxious to know if since that time anything has been done to discover why the wall was built, by whom, and when, where, was the sandstone for the wall brought from, as there is none in the surrounding country.

Do any of the readers know Billie the Bear, a pioneer cowboy? Also Red Jacket, a well known character of pioneer days of the West?—C. A. M.

SOME time ago the following newspaper clipping was sent in to Camp-Fire by G. M. Allen of Florence, Arizona. I passed

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it on to E. E. Harriman, and his opinion follows the newspaper article. Stories of buried treasure have a fascination for most of us, but, when it comes down to the cold, hard, practical question of what are the chances of really finding the treasure, then—well, that's something else. Mr. Harriman's letter was written a year ago, when he was wandering around a bit. Have there been any developments since then?

What is believed to be the first clew to the reputed buried treasures of the padres of the Tumacacori mission, built by Spanish Jesuits high up in the Tumacacori Mountains, less than three hours journey from Tucson, has been discovered by Frank Pinkley, custodian of the ruins. It is the gateway to the mission cemetery. From this gateway, it is said, the plans and maps left by the padres start to outline the way to the buried gold and silver.

The Tumacacori Mission was built near what are believed to be the ruins of one of the Seven Cities of Cibola. Scattered over the long, red mesa surrounding the mountains, are large numbers of hieroglyphic boulders, which, say the modern Indians, Aztecs placed there to mark the hiding-place of another great treasure hidden in the neighborhood. This is said to consist of 2050 burro-loads of white silver and 905 burro-loads of gold and silver.

The entire region is said to show evidences of rich mineral deposits, which, declare those who have inspected the mountains, doubtless led the padres to build their missions.

IN THE sides of the mountains lie the ruins of many dwellings, while on the top, carved from solid rock, is the Aztec god standing guard over the silent city.

Nearby, on a large flat rock, are the stone basins that held the bleeding hearts of the victims sacrificed to appease the wrath of the stone image. Hundreds of these sacrifices are said to have been made each year.

There are five of these ancient villages in the vicinity of Tucson and two immediately across the Mexican border in Sonora. Some say they are the seven cities referred to by the conquistador, Cabeza de Vaca.

A newer city, that of Tubac, meaning "Ruined House," stands near the mission, but little is known of the life there.

Ten acres of land on which the Tumacacori mission was located have been deeded to the United States Government and the plot now is known as the Tumacacori national monument. It is under the direction of Frank Pinkley, who also supervises the mysterious Casa Grande ruins near Florence.

Samoa, California.

Regarding the buried treasure in the Tumacacori Mountains, the information seems rather nebulous. It is quite possible that the padres did bury a large treasure around there. Two years ago a puncher, looking for strays in a like place in Graham County, found a shovel sticking out of a tree and under it discovered treasure to the value of about $400,000, according to the papers. This story was corroborated by the mother of the man who found the treasure, in a personal letter to me.

I HAVE never been able to discover that any man had any thing like accurate directions or maps for relocating this treasure. I have heard of it many times and have talked with a number who have been in that section. As far as I could learn, the directions in existence are incomplete and vague. It is possible that Pinkley's discovery may complete them to such an extent that a discovery may be made later.

As for the Aztec treasure, I "hae ma doots" about the hieroglyphic stones being there for any such purpose as stated. They are a great deal more likely to have some religious significance, or they may tell of some events in the history of these strange people. They may prove, when translated, as unsatisfactory as the brass plate in the old story. It held strange characters, scratched on with a sharp point. Treasure trove stories set many to eager endeavors to secure a translation. At last they found a man who read the scratches.

"This belongs to Jan Van Voort. Damn the man that steals it," said the brass, in old Dutch characters.

Now let some one read the hieroglyphics.—E. E. H.

COLONEL JAMES BOWIE. Yes, he ought to provide some interesting Camp-Fire talks. Mr. Pendexter of course gave our inquiring comrade what data he had, but the subject is too big for one man to cover thoroughly nor can any one man easily collect all the scattered data that an inquiry to Camp-Fire can produce.

Bakersfield, California.

Some time ago I wrote you with reference to Colonel James Bowie, one of the Alamo victims, and you told me you were referring my query to Mr. Pendexter. You stated that in case Mr. Pendexter could not help me, you would try to present my case to Camp-Fire—and I am herewith asking you to redeem your promise.

BRIEFLY stated, the matter stands thus: The redoubtable Colonel—to whom I bear a distant relation—figured largely in the history of the Southwest generally, and particularly in the days of Texas' struggle for independence. That period should be rich in material for the man of literary tendencies; likewise, the lives of such men as Bowie, Crockett, Travis, et al., read pure adventure to us of modern days.

It is my idea that among the old-timers of Camp-Fire there must be at least a few who possess, in one way or another, facts and scraps of information concerning the life of Bowie which would make mighty interesting Camp-Fire talk—besides being of considerable value to his unworthy relative. There are very few people who are unacquainted with the bowie-knife—how many Americans know anything at all of its originator?—HUGH J. BOWIE.

IF YOU have character, will-power, strength of mind, horse-sense and other things like that, you'll carefully refrain

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from reading the following from Romaine H. Lowdermilk until after you've read his story in this issue. If you don't, it will give away the outcome of the story in advance.

I'll bet you don't take my advice.

Wickenburg, Arizona.

SAY, have you ever been broke? Haw, ask the Camp-Fire that! Of course you have. If you haven't you've likely missed something enjoyable. To the true adventurer being broke is simply the "broad" that lets you into the realm of more adventure. If a fellow's broke, or going broke, or just getting over being broke, he's bound to be going through something "different." And it's these "different" moments that make up the highlights you like to remember in moments of reminiscence.

WELL "me" and "Al" were broke—worse than broke. We were broke and in debt when we sold "Major Action" to what we thought was a sucker. Maj was the only horse we had that could do us any good in fast company but he wasn't any good unless he could run in the mud! And we just couldn't find any mud for him to run in. Three race-meetings, one right after the other, without a single day of mud! Ordinarily a boy with a "string" of racing horses thinks he's in luck as long as the tracks are dry, but with us it was different; we craved something soft that'd give our "mudder" a chance.

We didn't think we were having a funny time—not then we didn't. We didn't crack any jokes with our prospective buyer, either. And by the way it was a woman who bought our horse, instead of *Tondy*. We wheedled her to buy. We talked her into buying Maj. The next day it rained! (Fact was too strange for fiction so I made 'em irrigate the track. "Al" said it looked like somebody had helped the rain along with ditch-water, anyhow.) Yes sir, it rained! The track floated, oozed and burbled. Old Maj, taking advantage of that slush, pounded out a mile with a jolt that shook ten thousand berries into our "sucker's" nifty little change-cup. How'd she know it was going to rain? She'd played a "hunch"!—ROMAINE H. LOWDERMILK.

IT TAKES a long time to get things started when we have to communicate through the magazine and it takes several months for a communication to reach print after it reaches this office. But there has been real progress in the matter of our Camp-Fire "Stations" and we can open our list with twenty-seven Stations and eight others who have written in that they are interested but have not yet definitely undertaken a station, seven of them in Canada, one in Cuba and one in the Philippines. The Canada stations run from Vancouver to Prince Edward Island and in this country the States represented are Michigan, Oregon, Pennsylvania 2, California 4, New York 3, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Washington 3, Wisconsin, Maine 2, Ohio, Illinois, Texas, Vermont, Indiana, Iowa and District of Columbia. California heads the list, with Washington and New York second. (I don't know where my own home is going to be after October first or I'd add it to the list. Meanwhile and anyhow the office does service as a Station.)

The list follows: Those not yet definitely representing Stations are marked with a star:

CANADA—Vancouver, B. C. C. Plowden, B. C. Drafting & Blue Print Co.
Burlington, Ontario. Thos. Jocelyn.
The Post Weekly, Deseronto. Harry M. Moore.
Dunedin, P. E. Island. J. N. Berrigan.
Norwood, Manitoba. Albert Whyte, 172½ De Meurons St.
*Toronto, Ontario. W. de H. Hammond, 1302 Ossington Ave.
*New Toronto. E. Sheetz, Box 391.

CALIFORNIA—Oakland. Lewis F. Wilson, 1036 Thirtieth St.
Lost Hills. Mr. and Mrs. M. A. Monson, care of Gen. Pet. No. 2.
San Bernardino. Mrs. R. Souter, 275 K St.
Santa Monica. Col. Wm. Strover, Westlake Military School.

CUBA—Havana. R. N. Faries, Dominquer 7 Cerro.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA—Washington. Fagan's Cigar Store, 1404 New York Ave. N.W.

INDIANA—Connersville. Norba William Guerin, 112 East 18th St.

ILLINOIS—Chicago. John Bradford Main, care of The Junior Yanks, 144 S. Wabash Ave.

IOWA—*Bettendorf. Lloyd Royer.

MAINE—Bangor. Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main St.
* Carroll L. Houghton, 71 South St.

MASSACHUSETTS—Malden. Arthur R. Lloyd, 16 Cross St.

MICHIGAN—Marquette. T. Mitchell, Box 864, G. P. O.

NEW JERSEY—Caldwell. Charles A. Gerlard, P. O. Box 13.

NEW YORK—N. Y. C. Robt. V. Steele, Care of American Legion, 19 West 44th St.
Jamestown. W. E. Jones, 12 Fairview Ave.
*Ilion. Ross Travis, 7 Rand St.

OHIO—East Akron. Harry J. Lang, 137 South Arlington St.

OREGON—Marshfield. F. J. Webb, 200 Market Ave.

PENNSYLVANIA—Philadelphia. Wm. A. Fulmer, 252 S. 9th St.
Philadelphia. Alfred A. Krombach, 4159 N. Eighth St.

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PHILIPPINE ISLANDS—Ft. Wm. McKinley, Rizal. Marc Guissard, Cpl. 10th Service Co., Signal Corps.

TEXAS—Wichita Falls. A. M. Barlow, P. O. Box 51.

VERMONT—*Granville. R. L. Hastings.

WASHINGTON—Republic. A. E. Beaumont, Box 283.
Ione. A. S. Albert, Albert's Billiard Hall.
Seattle. *Col. C. D. Smyth, Gen. Del.

WISCONSIN—Madison. Frank Weston, Room 9, Tenny Bldg.

Signs are being printed. Various designs have been suggested but none seems better or has more support than the simple design of our Camp-Fire badge. Underneath it on the sign will be in smaller size the one word "*Adventure*," arranged as it appears on our covers. This, of course, is advertising for the magazine. I think it's been proved that we keep the Camp-Fire and its whole spirit free from use for advertising purposes, but in this case, since the house is to pay for the signs and record-books, it seems only fair that they should get what advertising value there is from the one modest word on the sign. Also its use there seems natural and legitimate. If any Station-Keeper objects to it, he can cut it off.

THESE Stations are going to grow in number. The services they perform, though simple ones, are valuable and much needed. It is understood that each Station Host or Keeper is the sole judge of the nature and extent of the hospitality offered, the only things being required of him being displaying the sign, keeping the register or record-book, and a box for mail to be called for or forwarded at the sender's risk. Those of us who wander will bear in mind that, in using a Station, we are not enforcing rights but accepting hospitality.

Send in your name for a Station. Those of you who have wandered in your day will find here an easy way of renewing old times, hearing again at first hand of once familiar places, of meeting or hearing from old friends. Those of you whom circumstances prevent from wandering can, through a Station, meet those who do the things they themselves would like to do and can gather personal news of the world's far corners.

Here is the definite statement of the Station idea. It is understood, of course, that the Stations do not belong to this magazine but so far as any one besides the Station Host himself is concerned, to Camp-Fire in general, nor has this magazine any responsibility for them. Our magazine figures in this only as the mouthpiece of the Camp-Fire at large. It will supply, free, the signs and books and will print from time to time the list of Stations, dropping from the "official" list any that on complaint from Camp-Fire seem prejudicial to the best interests of Camp-Fire and the Station plan as a whole.

A station may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a station shall display the regular station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and provide and preserve a sufficiently substantial register book. When there are enough stations to warrant even a small order this office will furnish the books and signs.

No responsibility for mail is assumed by anybody; the station merely uses ordinary care. Entries in register to be confined to name or serial number, route destination, permanent address and such other brief notes or remarks as desired; each station can impose its own limit on space to be used. Registers become permanent property of station; signs remain property of this magazine, so that if there is due cause of complaint from members, a station can be discontinued by withdrawing sign.

A STATION bulletin-board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to conditions of trails, etc., resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer, calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or tips about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin-board.

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above station privileges (Question of requiring identification-cards or Camp-Fire button to be decided later.) Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

A station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its possibilities as headquarters for a local club of resident Camp-Fire members is excellent.

AS YOU may have noticed, H. A. Lamb now signs Harold Lamb to his stories. Same man. Just wanted to use a signature that would make him less likely to be confused with other writers named Lamb. Which is a sound idea, though there's always some small loss in changing from one signature to another.—A. S. H.

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LOOKING AHEAD FOR DEMOCRACY

STUDY carefully our system of electing our national public officials. How much real voice do you have in it? How much voice do all the voters together really have in it? Once they are elected, how much real control do we have over "our" public officials? What is a democracy? Is *this* one?

Our present form of government is fundamentally the best we could have. But how good is even the best form if it is not really controlled by the people themselves?

HERE is a letter from Mr. Ralph Tuthill of Brooklyn, who disapproves of me:

Brooklyn, N. Y.

YOUR remarks following W. W. F.'s letter on page 185, issue of April third, convince me now that you are a hell of an American. I have suspected for some time that you are a pro-German, as the name Hoffman would indicate.

The New York State assembly did perfectly right in ousting the five dogs, and your logic is very faulty in claiming that they but represented the voters who sent them there. All honor to "Thad" Sweet and the assemblymen who threw the dirty beasts out, Charles E. Hughes to the contrary. Hughes is a "sissy," and anybody conversant with his utter lack of manly qualities can be well satisfied that he was not elected to the presidency. At that I voted for him, God forgive me, for I did not know him then. But I do now, having had abundant opportunity of sizing him up for the past thirty-six months through intimate contact.

"Looking Ahead for Democracy" means "Looking Ahead for the Ridgway Company" to you and nothing else matters.

I am but a naturalized citizen, but my Americanism is such that I have ever believed in the old slogan, "My Country, may she be right, but right or wrong my Country."

I suppose you believe also that Congress was entirely at fault in unseating Vic. Berger, the Milwaukee socialist; again I say that you are one hell of an American, which is true of most all the tramps and vagabonds that fall for your vaporings.—RALPH TUTHILL.

TO THOSE of you who have been reading this department and my talks in "Camp-Fire" running back through the war and for a number of years before 1914, I think there is no need to defend myself against a charge of pro-Germanism or of lack of Americanism. As to my name, it has been American for a couple of centuries, as have all my various threads of ancestry, and, as it happens, the only one of those threads that is not Scotch, Irish or English is the one that gives me my surname. That doesn't make me a better American than Mr. Tuthill or any one else recently naturalized, but it does seem to take the force out of the argument Mr. Tuthill bases on my name.

Now if he had said that I was a bad citizen I'd have had to admit that charge. I am a bad citizen in various ways. But I think I can in justice to myself say that I am no worse a citizen than the average American. We are most of us bad citizens. If we weren't, we'd not have got ourselves into so many troubles, would have less graft, less party politics, less denatured democracy, less a lot of ugly things.

AS TO Mr. Tuthill's "Looking Ahead for the Ridgway Company," well, I don't quite get his idea. It's true that, this magazine not being my personal property, I have no right to use any of its space for anything that does not interest readers and that therefore would not contribute to making the magazine a salable commodity. If any of you can tell me any other way in which the Ridgway Company profits from this department I shall be glad to hear it. As to anything said in this department being in any way or in any degree influenced by the Ridgway Company I can not prove that it is not. I can only give my word that it is not. Nor by anybody or anything else except my honest opinions. The Ridgway Company once half-questioned my using any, or so much, space, for any such purpose in a magazine whose primary object is to amuse its readers. The many endorsing letters from readers have justified taking the space, but, so far as the Company has ever expressed itself at all on the subject, its opinion, on the single occasion in the past, was against, not for, the department.

I left Mr. Hughes' name in the letter because I believe he will no more object to receiving that kind of empty abuse than I do.

THE real importance of Mr. Tuthill's letter is as an example of one kind of American citizen against whom the progress of real democracy must struggle. Blind loyalty to country is infinitely better than no loyalty at all, but the kind of loyalty that most helps the country is the kind that first of all tries to make her right.—A. S. H.

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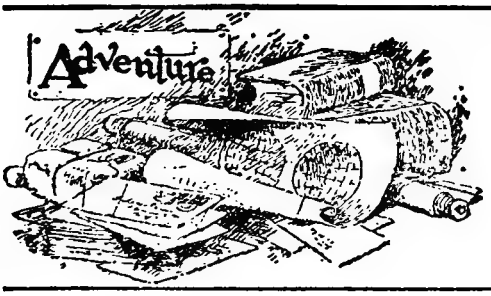

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application*. We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply Adventure *back through* 19'8, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL BUY: July and Dec., 1912; Sept. and Nov., 1913; Apr., 1914; May, 1915; Oct., 1916; Jan., 1917; First Oct. and Mid-Nov., 1918; Mid-Jan., Mid-Feb., Mid-Nov., 1919. Will pay twenty-five cents per copy, C. O. D., for any or all of above.—Address CLINTON L. TAYLOR, Whitfield, N. H.

WILL SELL: June, 1915; Dec., 1916; Aug., 1916; Mar., 1917; June, 1917; First Jan. to Mid-Feb., 1918 (inclusive); First Aug., 1918; First Sept., 1918; all copies since and including First Dec., 1919.—Address C. F. MEIER, Bouton, Iowa.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *unstamped* envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 1833 S St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, Seattle Press Club, 1309 Fifth Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, 6 W. Concord Ave., Orlando, Florida. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially* early history of Missouri valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber sections.

9. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
LARRY ST. JOHN, 1101 Kimball B'ld'g., Chicago, Ill. Covering Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Lake Michigan. Fishing, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, clamming, early history, legends.

10. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

11. Western U. S. Part 2 and Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10 st., Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

12. Mexico Part 2 Southern
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering that part of Mexico lying south of a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, commerce.

★*(Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached)*
Return postage not required from U. S. or Canadian soldiers, sailors or marines in service outside the U. S., its possessions, or Canada.

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13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 1
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 2
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., covering southeastern Ontario and the lower Ottawa Valley. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping.

15. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

17. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

18. North American Snow Countries. Part 6
H. S. BELCHER, The Hudson's Bay Company, Ft. Alexander, Manitoba, Canada. Covering Manitoba, Saskatchewan, MacKenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

19. North American Snow Countries Part 7
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Richmond, Quebec. Covering New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper and wood-pulp industries, land grants, water-power.

20. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

21. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

22. South America. Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile; geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

23. South America Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Covering Venezuela, The Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

24. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

25. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, Box 807A., University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, N. M. Covering history, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, exports and imports, manufacturing.

26. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Maine. Covering Japan: Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

27. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

28. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

29. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

30. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

31. ★ Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, Care Society of Authors and Composers, Central Buildings, Tothill St., Westminster, London, England. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, tansport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

32. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

33. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shot-guns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shot-Guns (including foreign and American makes). J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg, Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen. Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached)*

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The Columbia River Valley

AMERICAN Beauty roses growing along the roadways; $14,000 profit per year raising cabbage seed on a 22-acre farm; two weeks of Winter; pansies in November. Where? In the wonderful Willamette country and northward from Portland. It's not surprising that an Easterner took a look at the Far West in Spring and exclaimed "I'll eat grass before I'll go back East again:"

Question:—"I am very much interested in the Far West, especially Portland, Oregon, and its vicinity. Please give me a description of the city and country roundabout.

What sort of climate has the Willamette Valley? Are the Winters in western Oregon and Washington as mild as reports make them? Is the land unusually fertile? How about the country for flower raising?"—MRS. NANNIE SHRYOCK, Chamblee, Ga.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—I agree with you that Portland, and in fact the whole Willamette Valley in Oregon is a delightful section; but, having been over a great deal of this western coast, I must admit that there are other places in Washington that look very attractive to me.

As for Portland, it has a wonderful reputation as a rose center, which it deserves, but this is true of the entire west coast from Bella Coola south. Take the Skagit Valley in Washington, where I make my home, for example. Today, November, I was out in an open car driving without an overcoat or even a sweater, and the air was so balmy that at times I took off my hat the better to enjoy it. In the yard there are a number of roses still blooming, and the same may be seen anywhere along the roads. A neighbor has as pretty a bed of pansies in as full bloom as one could expect in June, while a mile from here there is a wild rosebush at least ten feet high that is glorious in the display of a second crop of bloom, great scarlet blossoms that rival the tame singles like the Fiametta and the Cherokee. I have a few sweetpeas still blooming and a tuft of snapdragon that bids fair to last till Christmas.

Thus, while admitting that Portland is all one could wish, it has no monopoly of beauty on the Coast. In fact, I could name you a dozen towns that really beat it but are unknown from lack of advertisement. A friend came out here from Michigan last Summer and expressed his astonishment at seeing the beautiful La France and American Beauty roses planted along the streets of Mount Vernon, Burlington and other towns in this section. His wonder was both at their excellence and the fact that no one molested them. I had not noticed this latter feature, but the reason was that no one wanted them. They were too common. Why steal what any one would load you with for the asking? That was the reason.

Oregon is wonderful. But I want you to realize that there are hundreds of square miles of the beauties to be found in Portland lying around loose here in the West.

Our Winter, if we have one, generally comes in January and lasts about ten days. Sometimes we have sufficient snow for the children to play in with hand sleighs. Real sleighing for teams is never seen. At times a cold snap will come that will give us a couple of inches of ice on the shallow ponds. Then we skate, or what we call skating, but as a rule the sun is warm enough by noon to make this a certainty for wet feet and the fun is over.

Industrially this country is good. There are plenty of chances for work at the dullest time of the year.

This is one of the most fertile spots on earth. Two hundred bushels of oats to the acre is common, and other crops yield in proportion. A man who lives two miles from me paid $11,000 for a twenty-two acre tract. He paid for it with the first crop and had a substantial balance left to finance him till the next harvest. Among other things, the place yielded $14,000 worth of cabbage seed. Records prove that this is nothing unusual.

Brazilian Rubber Hunting

TOO many Americans have the idea that one can step off an Amazon River boat and walk back into the jungles as safely and easily as a picnic party invades the wooded shores of the Hudson. There are fortunes awaiting determined, able-bodied men who are well prepared to face hardships and withstand disease. But to think one can make chums of the natives, snap his fingers at jaguars, live like a camper in the Adirondacks, is ridiculous. Brazil is nearly as large as the United States. Its forests are vast, trackless jungles. Many of its wild tribes have never seen a white man. Disease takes all but the hardy and the wise. And they often come home with fortunes:

Question:—"I am interested in going to Brazil for rubber. What would be of most value to trade to the Indians? How much money would it take? Is Brazil a healthy country?

Are the natives in the interior hostile? Would I be able to get supplies after I landed?

Would I have to get a permit or license to trade there?

In case I should fail to get rubber or have any hard luck is there any work that I could do to pay my way home? I have heard that there are diamond mines in Brazil. Is that a fact?"—G. A. B., Horton, Kansas.

Answer, by Mr. Goldsmith:—If you are interested in rubber, probably the best South American country for trial would be Brazil. The point of departure into the interior would be Pará, at the mouth of the Amazon. This could not be reached by the great steamers that ply between New York and Rio de Janeiro. It would be necessary to take a smaller boat that stops at Pará, or to go by one of the large boats to Bahia, and then return to Pará.

Of course there are many opportunities in the gathering and developing of crude rubber. In most of the Amazon country in which rubber

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abounds, the climate is very hot and would be trying upon a North American. If you have in mind working as a laborer, collecting the gum, you would find that you would have to work in complete isolation subjected to many discomforts, such as sickness, mosquitoes, malaria, etc.

I think that the natives in the part of the country where rubber is gathered would not be hostile, but unless one could talk with them, they might not be particularly friendly or companionable.

If you intend to work with rubber, you would not have an opportunity to do much trading with the Indians.

The fare from New York to Rio de Janeiro first-class is $360; second class, $175. The first-class fare to Bahia, the first stop of the boat in Brazil, is $330; and the second-class fare, $145.

If you went directly to Pará, the cost would be less than to Bahia; if you went to Bahia and returned to Pará, you would have to add, say, from twenty to thirty dollars. I should think you ought to have at least two hundred dollars when you reach Pará.

You could secure supplies at Pará.

For such trading as you might wish to do, you could easily secure an inexpensive license at Pará.

In case of failure to secure rubber, what you could do to support yourself and bring you back to the United States, would depend entirely upon your general capacities, and you have not told me anything about them. There are unquestionably many diamond mines and many diamonds in Brazil, but the diamonds are, as a rule, not found in the country to which you would go for rubber.

The Ozark Mountains

ALTHOUGH one thinks of the Ozark Mountains of Missouri as surrounded and influenced by civilization to the extent that they are rather tame, this is only partly true. There are many high hills where wolves still hunt at night, and not a few tracts of tall timber where one can shoot game from squirrels to deer. The fishing, moreover, is famous, a fact which, in itself, makes these Mid-Western mountains attractive:

Question:—"Do you consider the Ozark Mountains good for hunting and trapping? When does the season begin and end?

Can one buy a few acres of timber five or six miles away from a town? What would be the average price per acre?

What animals are native to these mountains? Must one secure a license? What is the cost of same?

What sort of Winter should one expect? When ought a start to be made?"—R. H. HILBERT, Chicago, Ill.

Answer, by Mr Thompson:—The Ozark Mountains are good places to hunt, fish and trap, especially in Missouri along Current or Little Black Rivers. The trapping season begins in November and ends in March. The hunting season continues from June to November 10th, according to the game.

You can buy three or four acres near town and you can get it in forty-acre tracts at about $10 per acre.

The animals are quails, turkeys, deer, wildcat, mink, wolves, skunks, 'possum, 'coon, doves, ducks, squirrels, rabbits, etc., and fishing is elegant. After you live there only a one-dollar resident license is required, a non-resident ten dollars.

There is little snowfall; seldom gets to zero. Would get located in Spring; then you can fix your place in advance and locate good trapping and shooting grounds. Can not stop you on any land that is not fenced, and very little of it is fenced.

Would get Ithaca 12-gauge shotguns. They are the best for the money, though I do not own one, shoot one or have any interest in making this statement except that you purchase something that will stand the racket at a moderate figure. You will need all kinds of traps from 0 to 4.

Jobs in the Canadian Timberland

THERE'S plenty of need for strong young men in the big north woods. The life is not a hard one, the pay is good, and a season in the lumber country has built up many a man into a healthy, robust citizen:

Question—"I am earnestly desirous of locating with some lumber camp in most any capacity. I am in perfect health, accustomed to hard, rough work, and have a strong desire to get out into the open. I am twenty-three years of age and a college graduate, and have spent three years in the U. S. Navy and in command of a vessel.

How can I locate lumber camps to make application for work?

What are the chances of obtaining employment for an inexperienced man?

Any other information you could give me which would give me an opportunity to get out into the open would interest me very much."—W. B. MITCHELL, New York City.

Answer, by Mr. Moore:—Write to any one of the following firms for a position. Tell them what you can do. If they take you on, they will give you every chance in the world, pay you well, feed you well, use you well. Your inexperience in the bush should not stand in your way. Inexperienced men become experienced men in an incredibly short time. What the lumber companies want is men who will work (and it isn't such hard work either), men who will take things as they come and do their best. Drop a line to any one of the following firms. They all lumber on the Ottawa River and its tributaries:

J. R. Booth, Ottawa, Ont., Canada.
A. B. Gordon, Ottawa Ont., Canada.
R. McConnell, Ottawa, Ont., Canada.
W. C. Edwards Co., Ottawa, Ont., Canada.
E. B. Eddy Co., Hull, Que., Canada.
McLachlin Bros., Arnprior, Ont., Canada.
Gillies Bros., Braeside, Ont., Canada.
Colonial Lumber Co., Pembroke, Ont., Canada.

Experienced men are paid $55 to $65 per month and board. Inexperienced men are paid $16 per month and board, up.

A. B. Gordon is shipping men to his camps from

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Ottawa every Monday and Wednesday in the Fall. Fare is advanced to destination and taken from first pay.

For a life in the open, good healthful work free from all conventions, temptation and privations, lumbering is ideal. The men are fed well. The sleep camps are as warm and comfortable as it is possible to have them. The shantyman as a rule is a good, clean, decent sort.

Your education should stand in good to work into the job of clerk, time-keeper, culler or one of the various light jobs about a lumbering camp. Your experience with men will also come in good in time, but you must not expect to be made a foreman in a fortnight. Shanty foremen, like the rest of us, have had to fight hard and long to get to the top.

In conclusion, dress for comfort. There is no style in the woods. Outfit yourself with good, heavy, warm clothing. Canadian Winters are very severe.

Riding and Roping

MOST of us have watched a man rope four riders in a Wild West show, or spin *la riata* with smiling ease, and wondered "how he got that way." It's an art that can only be learned by long practise. But if you've the time and inclination, here's how it's done:

Question:—"Could you give me any information on the art of riding and roping as practised by cowboys? Please include the handling of bad horses, fancy roping tricks such as twirling, and tell me the proper kind of rope to use. Also, how are rawhide quirts, reatos, hackamores and bridles made?

Where could one obtain pictures of the West by Remington and Russell?"—H. F., Houghton, Saskatchewan, Canada.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—Much of the information you seek can not be taught properly on paper. It requires a demonstration—many of them—and months—years of practise. Of necessity my information must be skeletonized.

Riding. This must be done on a Western type saddle, as no other adapts itself to the work. Ride with a stirrup leather long enough to let the leg hang naturally, as it does when on a bareback horse. Use wooden stirrup and tapaderos—leather front to keep the foot from sliding on through too far, and give the horse all the spring of your ankle.

That is, rest the ball of your foot in stirrup and put some weight on it. As horse travels let your foot and ankle take the shock of each step. Riding thus I have never given a horse a sore back in my life and I am a heavy man—over 200 ever since I was twenty-five.

Keep toes in parallel with horse and grip with leg from hip to knee. Practise swinging body about at all angles, with legs in position.

Roping. Use a manila rope, 40 to 45 feet long. Buy a galvanized iron form for a honda, which is made like a tube split in half and bent into an egg shape. Run the end of your rope around this tightly and splice back into itself so that it lies snugly in the groove.

Now stretch rope between two trees or posts, take a smooth stick of about two inches and two feet long, lay it along the rope, bring rope over one end and twist stick across rope. This gives one wrap about the stick. Now grip both ends and draw stick from post to post and repeat. This gradually works out the kinks and limbers the rope up.

When the rope shows no tendency to kink and is limber to the hand, you have a riata or lariat as it is wrongly called. *La riata* is the correct name. Now begin practising whirling the noose. Make a loop no larger than a barrel-head to start with. It will take you days to get so you can make this ride level and whirl. Once you have the bit of sleight of hand that does that, enlarging the loop is soon caught.

This can not be taught on paper; that is flat.

Practise for roping by swinging a four-foot loop. Start with honda half way down the side of loop, hand gripping both the main rope and loop with honda on thumb side. Revolve hand on wrist just as hand comes over left side of head. This keeps loop open. Throw with gentle motion that lets far side of loop lead it out of opening hand.

Practise, practise, practise, world without end—amen. That is what does it. I learned to rope at fourteen by daily practise on gentle cattle in yard and on sheep. The art of roping a foot consists of throwing rope so side of loop strikes ground in front of foot, while the loop itself is still open and raised. The advancing foot enters loop as it swings forward. A quick twitch on rope sets loop. Then there is the flip throw, where the loop is not swung about head. Only practise—practise, with a certain amount of manual dexterity.

I could teach you more in an hour's demonstration than in a year of typewriting. I know of no book that teaches leather work such as you mention. You can learn a lot about making braided quirts by a close examination of one. I learned how to make a bull-whip in that way and turned out one 12 feet 6 inches long when I was fifteen. All rawhide soaked in oil till limber. I could cut a cow's hair with it.

Frederick Remington was not a cowboy artist any more than he was an Indian artist. Russell was a cowboy and turned artist. I called on Russell in Pasadena, near here, a week ago. His pi tures sell at from eighteen hundred to seven thousand dollars apiece.

To find out about prints of Remington's pictures, write to The Century Company, New York City. They used many of them in their work. Few of Russell's have been printed. His work is in oils and large. He showed me eleven canvases that ran from 30 to 36 inches in height and from 48 to 54 in width.

Right here let me say that I have never seen such perfect Western atmospheric effects produced by anybody as Russell has in his views of the Montana hills. One I wanted, with a great longing, but the price was six thousand dollars. Oh my, oh me, how I did want that picture!

When you write to The Century Company about the Remington pictures, ask them to tell you where you can get a catalog of Russell's.

Now, about handling bad horses. That is a trade in itself and one where natural aptitude counts for a lot. Cow-punchers will rope a bad one and snub him. They have a snubbing-post set in the middle of the corral. Sometimes they will snub him so

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sharply that he turns a somersault and lands on his back. It is quite a customary thing to throw a bad one and blindfold him before they let him up. Then they throw a heavy saddle on him and cinch it so tight it nearly cuts him in half. A buster forks him, gets his feet in the stirrups and some guy jerks the blindfold off. This is always outside the corral.

Then everybody yells "Let 'im buck, cowboy! Fan him! Fan him! Give 'im ——! Ki-yi! See 'im go!"

In my youth I had a reputation for gentling bad ones, but not in that way. I won their confidence and at the same time taught them I was boss, without being at all cruel. I broke many a colt and they never knew they were being broken. I taught them a little at a time, instead of crawling their hump and "busting 'em."

I made one own me as boss by throwing him on hard ground and I did it without ropes. He was a stallion that weighed 1,200 pounds and he thought he was boss till I downed him.

The Rary method, used by Professor Rary, was to buckle a surcingle around the horse, with several rings on it. Put on a bridle, ran a rope through a ring on surcingle and down to one front foot. Another on the other side the same. A long leading-rein on bridle. Then, when the horse did not obey a command, he pulled on a rope as a foot was lifted, then jerked the other rope tight as the animal reared and it came to its knees, with both front feet held at its body.

You can teach a horse to lead without pulling, and to follow the whip, by holding it by a rope and gently flicking the legs with whip. When it comes to you, pet it; when it goes away, flick it again.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

RINGENBURG, LESTER. You will learn something to your advantage if you communicate with A. F. R., care of E. B. CARL, Frankfort, Ind.

FRANCIS, J. F. Compositor by trade. About forty-eight years old; home town, Cleveland, Ohio. Last heard of in New York in 1908. Please communicate with S., care of *Adventure.*

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

RAINS, MRS. DAVE. Last heard of near Roswell, New Mexico, in 1915. Any one knowing her whereabouts please write to her nephew.—LOUIE LAMAR, 503 West 6th St., Austin, Texas.

DOYLE, MICHAEL. Last heard of in Evanstown, Ill. Married a girl by name of Maggie Healy. Any information will be appreciated.—Address CHARLES MURRAY, 270 Regina St., Quebec, Canada.

HEFFBRAN, OTTO A. Sometimes called "Red." Was at Rockingham Park, Salem, N. H., Co. F, 4th Reg. Eng.'s in July and August, 1917. In September, 1917, he was at Lynnfield, Mass., Battery C, 102nd Reg. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write to his sister. —MRS. GRACE BROOKS, Suite 9, 53 Maine St., Haverhill, Mass.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the First February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

DAVIDSON, FRANK LESLIE. Australian from Idropilly, near Brisbane. About thirty years of age, medium build, slender, light hair and blue eyes. Last seen in Kansas City, August, 1914. Any one knowing his present whereabouts please communicate with THOMAS F. BARNETT, Lewisburg, Tenn.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

RAY, JAMES RICHARD. "Tom." Last heard of at B. F. Goodrich Rubber Co., Akron, Ohio. Thought to have gone overseas. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address J. O. JERNIGAN, 1014 West Eastland Ave., Nashville, Tenn.

BERGMANN, FRED. Last heard of in San Francisco in 1915. Was going prospecting. Surveyor by trade. Would like to hear from you. Any information concerning him will be appreciated by his nephew.—Address KARL BERGMANN, Madalin, Post Office, Tivoli, N. Y.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the First February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

CANFIELD, RUSSELL H. Last seen in Mobile, Ala., in Sept., 1916. Was said to have been planning a sea trip to a port in Italy as oiler on a steamer. Age twenty-four, blue eyes and light hair. Wore artificial leg on right limb. Any information will be appreciated by his mother. —Address MRS. HELEN CANFIELD, Atmore, Ala.

HOWELL, ED. When heard from last was landing in New York, having returned from France, in May, 1919. Was a companion of my son of the 110th Reg., who died in France. Would like to locate him if possible. Any information concerning his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address L. DIETRICH, Locke, Wash.

LEE, DELBERT E. Last seen by his mother in Los Angeles, Cal., February, 1918. About five feet eleven inches tall, weighs 150 pounds, dark hair and eyes. Known to friends as "Duke." Any one knowing his whereabouts or any information concerning him please write to his brother.—RAY J. LEE, 322 Fourth St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

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Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

COGHILL, ION D. Sometimes known as D. I. Kelly. Last heard of in Los Angeles, Cal. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address "BILLIE," care of *Adventure*.

KIRCHER, HUGO H. Age twenty-eight: formerly of Flint, Mich. Any one having knowledge of his whereabouts inform him of the death of his father and the desire of his mother to have him home. Last heard of as an enlisted man in the Navy, but was discharged at Mare Island, Sept. 2, 1910.—ADDRESS R. L. BEAL, 99 Superior Boulevard., Wyandotte, Mich.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the Mid-June or First July issues of Adventure. They can get the name of the inquirer from this magazine:

ASHTON, ROBERT NEWTON; Barker, Donald; Bellows, Fred L.; Bohler, Eddie L.; Bundy, Ellis; Butler, Harry; Carson, James; Chesworth, Thomas; Clingham, Charles; Covington, Wm. G.; Douthwright, Frederick and William; Doyle, John; Dunn, Arthur A.; Fairbanks, Luther; S.; Gilly, Thomas; Given, John; Greely, Pearl Adam; Harding, Dick; Hester, Clifford E.; Lorak, Edward; Lowey, Daniel; McCormick, Thomas C.; Miller, Dick; Mills, Frank B.; Mouch, Pearl McCandliss; Ogg, Linwood C.; Painter, Frank B.; Price, "Slim"; Russell, Wm. Jefferson; Siegfried, Otto; "Slippery Slim"; Stokes, Vincent Walter; Stover, Jack; Treber, Birch; Wilkinson, Fred W.; Wilmont, F. B.; Wilson, George; Wilson, Virgil Elwood.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH: Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Roy Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; Lieut. Wm. S. Hilles; G. H. Atkins: G. E. Hungerford; A. Gaylord; E. J. Moran: F. S. Emerson: E. Murphy; H. E. Copp; J. Dunn; J. Higmon; E. Cunningham; Dennis F. Crolly; L. E. Patten; T. T. Bennett; J. E. Warner; Sinn Cardie.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity.

BEATON, SGT.-MAJOR G. M.; Benson, Edwin Worth; Bonner, Major J. S.; Mrs. Brownell; Carpenter, Capt. Robert S.; "Chink"; Coles, Bobby; Cook, Elliot D.; Cook, William N.; Cosby, Arthur F.; Crashley, Wm. T.; Eager, Paul Roman; Erwin, Phil; Fairfax, Boyd; Fisher, Edward E.; Fisher, Sgt. R.; Garson, Ed.; Gordon, W. A.; Green, Billy; Green, W; Hale, Robert E.; Harris, Walter J.; Hart, Jack; Harwood, J.; Hines, Joseph; Hoffman, J. M.; Hughes, Frank E.; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Jackson, Robert R.; Kohlhammer, Jack; Kuckaby, William Francis; Kuhn, Edward; Kutcher, Sgt. Harry; Lafler, Mrs. Harry; Lancaster, C. E.; Larisey, Jack; Lauder, Harry; Lee, Capt. Harry, A. R. C.; Lee, Dr. William R.; Lewis; Warburton; "Lonely Jock"; Lovett, Harold S.; McAdams, W. B.; McGrath, Jack W.; MacDonald, Tony; MacNamee, Alva I.; Madsen, Sgt. E. E.; Martel, Leon H.; Nelson, Frank Lovell; O'Hara, Jack; Parker, G. A.; Parker, Dr. M.; Parrott, Pvt. D. C.; Phipps, Corbett C.; Rich, Wagoner Bob; Rinkenbach, Frank; Rundle, Merrill G.; Schmidt, G.; Scott, Pvt. James F.; Stremple, H. E.; Swan, George L.; Tripp, Edward N.; Van Tyler, Chester; Von Gelucke, Byron; Ward, Frank B.; Wheeler, S. H.; Williams, W. P.; Woon, Basil D.; Zorek, Leon; J. C. H.; L. T. 348; S 177284; 439; WS-XZ.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address E. F. BRACE, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

FIRST AUGUST ISSUE

A WHIZZER ON WILLER CRICK
A Complete Novelette *By W. C. Tuttle*

"To a poor cowboy in a cactus lan' little bit o' lovin' is simply gran'," sings *"Hashknife" Hartley*. But he and his partner find more of shootin' and bronco-bustin' than they do of lovin' among the Willer Crick folks.

THE ONDURABLE DANE *By Clay Perry*

A tale of the big-timber country, of the pulp-mills and of the spirit in man which drives him to his feet after he has taken the count of ten.

WULFHERE Conclusion *By A. B. Higginson*

Of the quarrel of the *Bear Brethren*, and their fearful leap.

A FACE TO TIE TO *By George M. A. Cain*

A murder trial, and two square men who "come clean."

THE RED FIRE *By Harrison R. Howard*

"Cod-Liver-Oil" Haines, Lumpus O'Day and the place where partnerships are made.

THE SECOND MATE *By Walter Millis*

Mr. Henslow puts to sea with a grudge.

THE KING'S SWORD *By Charles Beadle*

With it Robert the Bruce hewed his way to a throne; and it proves equally useful today to Robert's descendant in his adventures among the Bantooks of Africa.

OLD FELLOWS *By Russell A. Boggs*

"We hire no men over fifty." A railroad rule with an exception.

THE MASTER PLOTTER* *By Edgar Young*

Even *Bruce Morgan*, brute, mocker of God, at last must face the Universal Master in the "Graveyard of South America." *An Off-the-Trail Story.

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CAUGHT!

By a Little Finger Print

THE "job" went off like clockwork. Everything happened according to plan—a clean getaway with $13,000. Mike O'Day laughed up his sleeve when he read the account in the paper next day—but he laughed too soon.

The company officials had secured the services of Richard Cutler, the noted Finger Print Expert. For him it was the work of only a few moments to discover and photograph four tell-tale finger prints on the window ledge. Within twenty-four hours the prints had been identified at police headquarters and the net was drawn around the unsuspecting Mike.

They found him in his lodging house, counting his ill-gotten gains, and sent him to prison.

Cutler had spent only one day on the case, but his pay was a $500 reward. Wouldn't you like to earn $500 that easily? Wouldn't you be mighty proud to be able to solve mysteries that baffle the ordinary detective?

Be a Finger Print Detective

A Fascinating Career for You

Now Cutler was just an ordinary fellow when he took up the study of finger print work. He had an average education and an average job as a clerk. After a few months' pleasant home-study, he had handled a few small cases and then opened up an office of his own.

In a very short time, he has built up a wide reputation as an expert and his services are in constant demand. He has received many rewards and collects large fees regularly.

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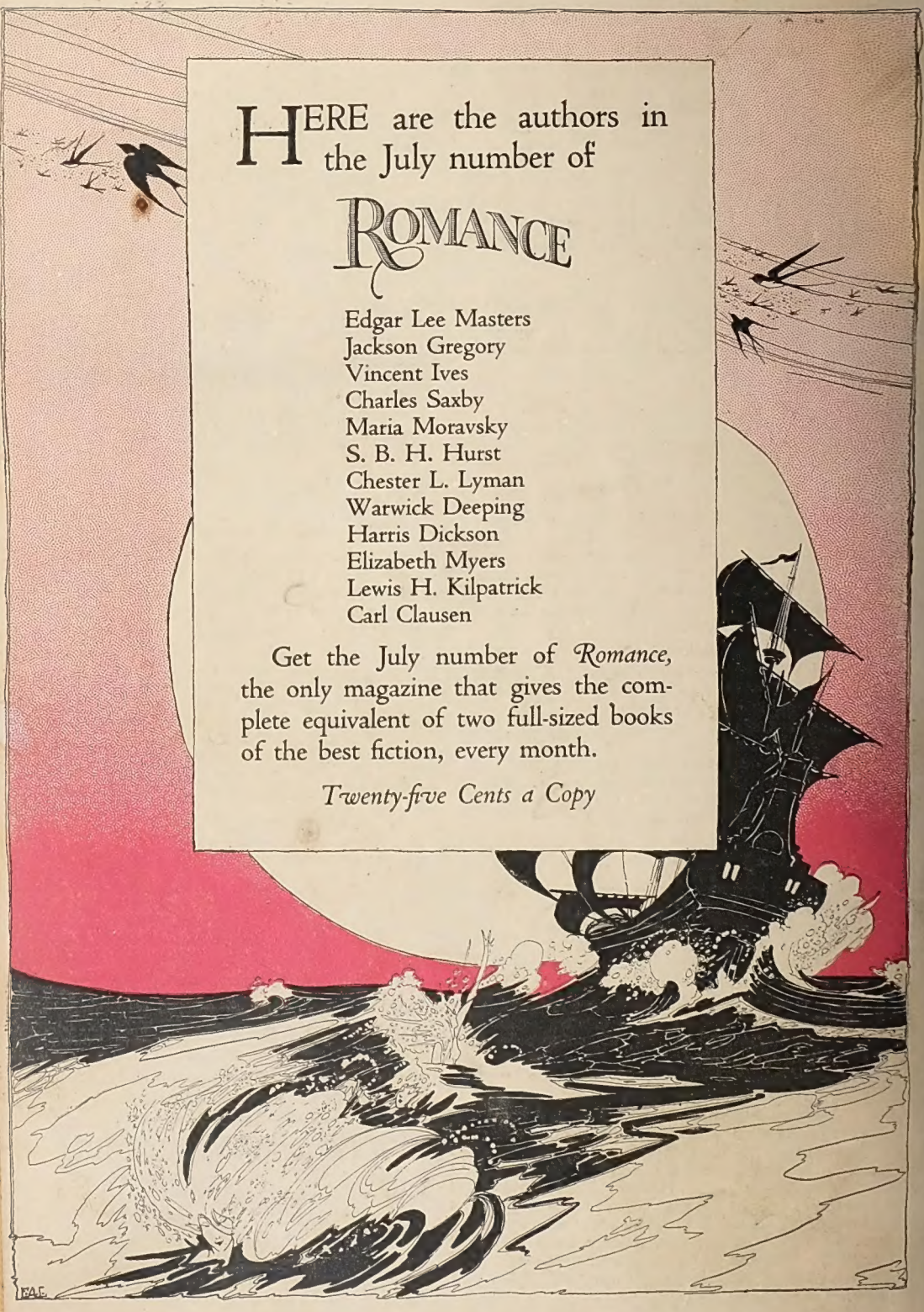

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